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Free to Deployed Areas

RIISING CASUALTIES TAKE TOLL ON AFGHANISTAN'S VETS

By JOSH SMITH ■ *Stars and Stripes*

LASHKAR GAH, Afghanistan — The rocket-propelled grenade slammed into the side of the Humvee with a blinding explosion, creating a shower of broken glass.

Police commander Qandagha Qandaghari stepped out of the vehicle to return fire. As he ran for position he stepped on an improvised land mine, one of the most ubiquitous and lethal weapons employed by Taliban insurgents during Afghanistan's war. When the dust cleared, he was conscious just long enough to see where his legs used to be.

Stories like Qandaghari's have become more and more

common as Afghan security forces have waded ever deeper into a conflict that shows no sign of abating.

As thousands of international combat troops prepare to depart, the Afghan forces they once worked with are facing a tide of casualties. The result is a growing population of injured veterans, orphaned children and widows in a country that often can't provide the most rudimentary health care, especially compared to the standards that coalition servicemembers are accustomed to in their home countries.

SEE CASUALTIES ON PAGE 4



Former Afghan National Army Maj. Shah Zaman describes the injuries he sustained when Taliban car bombers attacked his base in 2008. Zaman says the injuries still make it impossible for him to care for his family.

JOSH SMITH/Stars and Stripes

1,000 from 82nd Airborne headed to Iraq

By JON HARPER
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Approximately 1,000 paratroopers from the Army's famed 82nd Airborne Division will deploy to Iraq early

next year to help the Iraqi security forces take on the Islamic State group, the Pentagon announced Friday.

The soldiers from the 82nd's 3rd Brigade Combat Team, based at Fort Bragg, N.C., will begin to

deploy in late January to train, advise and assist the Iraqi forces, Pentagon press secretary Rear Adm. John Kirby told reporters.

Their mission is part of the coalition effort to build up the Iraqi army and Kurdish peshmerga so

that they can recapture territory from Islamic State militants.

The paratroopers are preparing for a nine-month deployment, according to a spokeswoman for the 82nd Airborne.

Approximately 300 troops from

other Army, Air Force and Marine Corps units will also deploy to provide "enabler" support in areas such as counterintelligence, logistics and signals, Kirby said.

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MILITARY

Army moves to reverse forced separation for roughly 160 officers

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VIDEO GAMES

'LittleBigPlanet3': Challenge, cute all rolled into one

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NBA

Celtics trade Rajon Rondo to Mavericks

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QUOTE
OF THE DAY

"We want Santa to bring snow, soon."

— Terry Goodwin, who was skiing in Anchorage, Alaska, near snowmaking machines that were churning out the white stuff amid strangely warm mid-December temperatures

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MILITARY

Army corrects retirement inequity

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

About 160 Army officers pegged to be forced out of the service with reduced benefits will now be allowed to remain on active duty or retire with full benefits after an Army review found numerous officers were unfairly targeted.

"Under the criteria for officer separations, these soldiers should not have been considered," Secretary of the Army John McHugh said in a statement issued Thursday. "This is an issue of fundamental fairness, and today we have taken appropriate action."

As the Army works to reduce its overall end strength and officer corps, it conducted a review of 19,000 potential candidates for separation and early retirement boards. However, during that review, only an officer's commissioned service was taken into account, which put troops with enlisted service at a disadvantage.

As a result, 44 officers with prior enlisted service were selected for early retirement even though they did not meet the minimum commissioned service threshold, the Army said. Those separations have been voided, and the officers now have the option of remaining in the Army until they have completed the necessary years of service to retire as an officer.

"These soldiers have served their country honorably both as enlisted soldiers and now as officers," McHugh said. "We owe them nothing less."



'This is an issue of fundamental fairness, and today we have taken appropriate action.'

John McHugh
secretary of the Army

ing demand for experienced junior officers. The Army's decision to restore the ben-

efits came after a congressional inquiry into the matter which found that the Army's plan would have cost a soldier \$1,000 a month, or \$1 million over a 40-year retirement, in the case of a captain forced to retire as a sergeant first class.

"To demote these soldiers in retirement is an injustice that devalues their service and will materially disadvantage them and their families for the rest of their lives," wrote a bipartisan group of senators in a November letter to McHugh. "We strongly urge you to take the necessary steps to rectify this situation in order to allow these soldiers to retire at the rank they have earned and appropriately honor their service to our nation."

"We appreciate that this oversight was brought to our attention and glad we were able to take corrective action in the best interests of these soldiers," McHugh said.

With the Pentagon facing steep budget cuts, the Army plans to decrease its active-duty end strength from a high of 570,000 during the peak of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to 450,000 by 2019. If sequestration — a congressionally mandated series of cuts over several years — is not repealed in the meantime, the Army will likely be forced to cut down to 420,000 troops.

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Pentagon's IED unit improperly collected intel

By TOM VANDEN BROOK
USA Today

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon's main arm for fighting improvised explosive devices engaged in unauthorized surveillance of U.S. citizens and companies and improperly collected intelligence from Afghan farmers when an analyst posed as a college student, according to an inspector general's report released Thursday.

The intelligence efforts by the Joint IED Defeat Organization — established to fight roadside bombs in Iraq and Afghanistan — were found to violate executive orders and regulations.

Two military officials, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly, confirmed that Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, released in June after five years in captivity by the Taliban, was one of the Americans on which JIEDDO collected information.

JIEDDO acknowledged the inspector general's findings, but a spokesman said they were minor technical issues that have been addressed.

The incidents involved regarded technicalities of policy and process and were corrected as soon as it was recognized, spokesman David Small said in a statement. "Many of the IG's recommendations to assure such actions do not occur in the future have already been acted upon."

The Pentagon inspector general found that members of JIEDDO's Counter-IED Operations Intelligence Integration Center "improperly collected information about U.S. persons. At the direction of COIC and JIEDDO leadership, analysts collected information on U.S. companies and their CEOs, U.S. hostages held by foreign extremists, and specific U.S. persons. In addition COIC analysts improperly collected intelligence using aliases and unco-

ordinated cover."

The information JIEDDO collected came from "open sources," which include newspapers, websites and other publicly accessible media. It was not electronic eavesdropping or surveillance.

The inspector general released the report in response to a Freedom of Information Act request made by several news organizations including USA TODAY. Large parts of the report have been redacted for classified information and names.

Among the violations found by the inspector general:

■ JIEDDO violated federal regulations by collecting information about Bergdahl, the inspector general found. Since the organization had no hostage-rescue mission, collecting information about Bergdahl was improper. The agency, which has some specialized software, was acting on a request from military officials to help find Bergdahl.

■ Contractors in 2012 improperly collected information about U.S. companies, whose names are blacked out in the report. The effort was related to JIEDDO's concerns about the FATIMA Group, the Pakistani manufacturer of fertilizer, the main component of homemade explosives used against U.S. troops in Afghanistan. A senior government official refused to collect the information and was reassigned to other duties, the report showed.

■ A JIEDDO contract employee in 2009, posing as an American college student, called farmers in Kandahar and asked them about their crops and their opinions about the U.S.-led war effort. The calls violated regulations about using aliases and unqualified, unauthorized personnel collecting human intelligence.

■ JIEDDO collected information on Facebook and Twitter. The discussion of JIEDDO's actions on social media are entirely redacted from the report.

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WAR/MILITARY

Bergdahl probe wraps up; top leaders briefed

By **LOLITA C. BALDOR***The Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The Army has finished its investigation into how and why Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl disappeared from his base in Afghanistan and plans to brief Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel this afternoon, officials said Friday.

Details about the probe's conclusion have been closely held. The report could include recommendations on whether Bergdahl should be charged with any criminal violations or forced to leave the Army. Potential charges could be desertion or leaving his post and being "absent without leave," or AWOL. The final disposition also will determine whether Bergdahl gets as much

as \$300,000 in back pay and other benefits.

Officials said Army Secretary John McHugh could send the case back to U.S. Army North, where the commander there, Lt. Gen. Perry Wiggins, would decide if charges are appropriate and what punishment is warranted, if any.

Bergdahl disappeared on June 30, 2009, reportedly walking away from his unit after expressing misgivings about the U.S. military's role — as well as his own — in Afghanistan. He was captured by the Taliban and was held by members of the Haqqani network, an insurgent group tied to the Taliban that operates both in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

On May 31, Bergdahl was handed over to U.S. special forces in Afghanistan as part of an ex-

change for five top Taliban commanders who were imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. After spending about two weeks recuperating at a U.S. military hospital in Germany, Bergdahl was sent to Brooke Army Medical Center at Fort Sam Houston on June 13. He is now doing administrative duties at the base, awaiting the conclusion of the case.

An initial U.S. military investigation in 2009 concluded that Bergdahl deliberately walked away, based on evidence available at the time. Since his release, some former soldiers who served with him have labeled him a deserter and said he should be held accountable for leaving his post. Others have suggested that troops were put in danger, and even killed, as they tried to find

Bergdahl.

But there are also those who contend that even if Bergdahl deliberately walked away, his five years in captivity were more than enough punishment for the soldier.

Shortly after Bergdahl was released, Army Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, left open the possibility that an Army investigation could result in desertion or other charges.

Maj. Gen. Kenneth R. Dahl was tasked to conduct an exhaustive investigation into the matter, and spent months interviewing unit members and commanders, and meeting with Bergdahl and his attorney, Eugene Fidell, a military justice expert who is also a visiting lecturer at Yale

Law School. He submitted his report in mid-October, setting off a lengthy legal review or his review and findings.

The deal to swap prisoners with the Taliban, meanwhile, enraged members of Congress who complained the administration violated requirements to inform lawmakers of any such transfer 30 days in advance.

A report by the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office said the Pentagon broke the law by not telling Congress and using nearly \$1 million of a wartime account to make the transfer.

Hagel told Congress that the Defense Department "acted lawfully in the operation to recover Sgt. Bergdahl, a judgment that was supported by the Justice Department."



ZANA AHMED/AP

A member of the Kurdish forces stands Thursday in an area damaged by an improvised explosive device placed by Islamic State militants that killed several Peshmerga fighters and injured dozens late Wednesday, when they pushed towards Sinjar Mountain, in Kask Reef, Iraq.

Iraq clashes with militants delay evacuation of Yazidis

By **SAMEER N. YACOB***The Associated Press*

BAGHDAD — Sporadic clashes between Iraqi Kurdish fighters and Islamic State extremists, as well as other logistical problems, are delaying the evacuation of the last Yazidis still trapped on Sinjar mountain, an Iraqi lawmaker said Friday.

Fighting was still underway near the mountain, said lawmaker Mahma Khalil, himself a member of Iraq's minority Yazidis. He also cited the need to plan and prepare for logistics and transportation as other reasons for the delay.

However, the Kurdish peshmerga fighters were able to ease the plight of the thousands of Yazidis still trapped on Mt. Sinjar and delivered a substantial amount of food and supplies to them.

The delivery was made possible after the peshmerga's battlefield advance on Thursday, when the

Kurdish fighters managed to retake some ground lost in the summer to Islamic State militants and opened up a corridor to the mountain.

The development was an incremental step in the battle to retake the town of Sinjar, at the foothills of the mountain by the same name, which fell to the Islamic State group in early August.

The Kurdish peshmerga troops, backed by U.S.-led coalition airstrikes, launched the operation to retake Sinjar on Wednesday.

"The situation of these trapped people is better now with the fresh supplies, and we hope to evacuate them as soon as possible," Khalil told *The Associated Press*.

The Islamic State group captured large swaths of territory in western and northern Iraq in a blitz earlier this year, plunging the country into its worst crisis since U.S. troops left at the end of 2011.

DOJ: Key militant leaders killed in coalition airstrikes

Stars and Stripes

U.S. airstrikes have killed several senior military leaders of Islamic State forces in Iraq, the Pentagon disclosed Thursday.

"I can confirm that since mid-November, targeted coalition airstrikes successfully killed multiple senior and midlevel leaders within the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)," Pentagon spokesman Rear Adm. John Kirby said in a statement.

"We believe that the loss of these key leaders degrades ISIL's ability to command and control current operations against Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), including Kurdish and other local forces in Iraq."

Gen. Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said in an interview with *The Wall Street Journal* that three key Islamic State military leaders in Iraq were killed there in recent weeks during operations that are part of an expanding coalition effort ahead of a planned offensive next year.

Between Dec. 3 and Dec. 9, American airstrikes killed Abd al Basit, the head of the Islamic State's military operations in Iraq, and Haji Mutazz, a key deputy to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the group, officials told the *Journal*.

In late November, another strike killed a midlevel com-

mander, Radwin Talib, the Islamic State's wali, or governor, in Mosul, officials told *The Wall Street Journal*.

The strikes in which the leaders were killed were designed to hamper the group's ability to conduct its own attacks, to supply its fighters and to finance its operations, Dempsey said.

"It is disruptive to their planning and command and control," Dempsey said. "These are high-value targets, senior leadership."

"The success of these airstrikes," Kirby said, "demonstrates the coalition's resolve in enabling the ISF to disrupt and degrade ISIL as they continue to regain control of their territory."

Airborne: Inherent Resolve leader says Iraqi capabilities to take at least 3 years to build

FROM FRONT PAGE

Last month, President Barack Obama authorized an additional 1,500 troops to deploy to Iraq to participate in the train, advise and assist mission. The deployment of elements of the 82nd Airborne is part of that initiative.

On Thursday, Lt. Gen. James Terry, the commander of Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve, told reporters that other countries in the coalition are expected to contribute to another 1,500-strong force for the capacity-building effort.

"The key to success out there will be increasing the capabilities of Iraqi security forces," Terry said.

Iraqi officials are reportedly eager to go on the offensive and to retake places like Mosul, but the U.S. military believes the Iraqis aren't ready.

Terry said the training effort "takes some patience," and it will take "a minimum of three years" to fully build the capabilities of Iraqi forces.



Terry

U.S. troops already in Iraq are laying the groundwork for the training program. But on Tuesday, Kirby said it will be "several months" before the formal training effort gets underway.

The plan is to train nine Iraqi army brigades and three peshmerga brigades at four training sites throughout Iraq. On Friday, Kirby declined to identify the locations of the sites, saying that

force protection measures are still being put into place. The additional advisers will be in Anbar province and areas north of Baghdad, according to Kirby.

He said the training and advising will take place at bases and higher headquarters, not near the front lines of the fighting.

During Operation Iraqi Freedom, the American military spent years and billions of dollars training and equipping Iraqi forces to take on insurgents. Many of those units collapsed in the face of the Islamic State group's attacks. Gen. Martin Dempsey, the chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, has said that about half of the Iraqi security forces that were in place before the Islamic State launched its offensives earlier this year are ineffective.

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WAR/MILITARY

Casualties: Family 'pays the price' if member of Afghan military is killed or wounded

FROM FRONT PAGE

In September, Interior Ministry officials said that across Afghanistan, more than 1,500 policemen died and 2,500 were injured during the preceding six months. The Defense Ministry refused to release military casualty figures. But in October, Gen. John Campbell, the top U.S. and ISAF commander in Afghanistan, told reporters that as many as 9,000 members of Afghanistan's security forces had been killed or injured in combat in the first 10 months of this year.

Both the International Security Assistance Force and Afghan officials said care for veterans is an issue handled solely by the Afghan government. The international coalition has no treatment programs as part of the follow-on advising-and-training mission, which will take effect on Jan. 1.

Gen. Zahir Azimi, spokesman for the Afghan Defense Ministry, said the families of soldiers killed in the fighting receive 100 percent of their salaries, while wounded soldiers receive a range of payments depending on the severity of their wounds. Injured soldiers who are able to work are kept on in the army, he said.

Veterans' care in the United States has been the subject of serious scandals of its own recently, but American veterans are on the receiving end of an entire government department devoted to their care, and former service-members are often eligible for health care, disability compensation and rehabilitation, pensions, education funding and vocational training, and home loans, among other possible benefits.

Although desertion remains a

constant challenge, so far the high costs for members of the security forces have yet to reduce enlistments in an economy in which steady jobs can be scarce.

But many veterans of both the police and the army around Afghanistan say they still feel left behind.

"My children are faced with a bad future if I can't be the father they need," Qandaghari, 23, said at his house in Lashkar Gah, speaking of his 5-month-old son. He had been married for less than a year when he lost his legs.

Since his injury, he has been homebound. But Qandaghari said it doesn't have to be that way.

In 2012, he graduated first in his class from the national police academy and worked at the Interior Ministry for a year before becoming commander of an elite special-operations unit in Helmand, one of the most violent provinces in Afghanistan.

That experience didn't disappear along with his legs, Qandaghari said.

"When I had my legs, I fought in every one of Helmand's 14 districts. But now that they're gone, I am nothing to the government. All I want is to work. I am proud to be an Afghan police officer and to fight for my country."

That plea was echoed by Shah Zaman, 48, a former major in the Afghan National Army. Sitting in his home in a small village outside Kabul, he recalled the day his life changed.

A graduate of Afghanistan's military academy 30 years ago, Zaman joined the army in 2003 after the allied invasion that drove the Taliban from power. He was placed in charge of securing one of the army's largest bases



Josh Snerre/Stars and Stripes

Qandaghari Qandaghari, a former commander of an elite police unit, sits in his home in Lashkar Gah, Afghanistan, and displays a photo of international military advisers with whom he worked before losing both his legs to a roadside bomb in Helmand during the summer.

in Kandahar province, a Taliban stronghold and one of the bloodiest for international and Afghan troops.

He was making his daily rounds one summer morning in 2008, inspecting defensive positions outside the base, when a car bomb exploded near the main gate.

When Zaman came to, he was being dragged from the flames by other soldiers. The blast killed two of his men outright and several civilians.

Doctors were unable to save the major's left leg, which was amputated just below the knee. They also wanted to remove his left arm, which had been shredded by shrapnel. Zaman had to borrow about \$20,000 to travel to India to receive the care necessary to save his arm.

The burden of his medical expenses and the lost income meant Zaman was unable to send his oldest son to college. He receives 60 percent of his former salary as a pension, but he said he has had no other contact or help from the government.

The 24-year-old son now works as a security guard, helping to support not only his young wife and two children, but his parents and seven brothers and sisters.

Family tops the list of concerns for one current lieutenant colonel in the Afghan army. He asked not to be identified because he was worried about protecting his job.

"No one wants their family member to have a dangerous job in the military," said the officer, who is based in Helmand. "But if someone is killed or wounded,

then it is the family that is ignored and pays the price."

While the tragedy may not have shaken his faith in the military or the job he was doing, Zaman said he has a hard time convincing his neighbors that it was worth it. "They see me and they see the problems and they think it was a waste. That I lost my body parts for nothing."

Like Qandaghari, Zaman said he had no regrets serving his country. "Once you wear the uniform, you know that this is a possibility," he said. "I just worry about the families of the veterans. They suffer the most."

Elyas Dayee and Zubair Babakarkhail contributed to this report. smith.josh@starsandstripes.com Twitter: @joshsmith

UN experts: Taliban who oppose peace are gaining prominence

By EDITH M. LEDERER

The Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS — Radical splinter groups within the Taliban movement that oppose any negotiation with Afghanistan's new government are gaining prominence, U.N. experts said in a report circulated Thursday.

The experts monitoring U.N. sanctions against the Taliban said that despite gestures by the international community and the

Afghan government in support of reconciliation, "there are currently no clear signals that the Taliban leadership is willing to engage in a political negotiation in a meaningful way."

The monitoring team noted, for example, that the release of Taliban members from the Bagram detention center and Afghan prisons and the transfer of five Taliban detainees from Guantanamo Bay to Qatar in exchange for U.S. Sgt. Bowe Berdahl, had not led to

any concessions from the Taliban.

A minority in the Afghan Taliban leadership continue to signal that they are willing to talk. But the experts said its central leadership is not only resistant to negotiations but attempted to disrupt the political process by targeting members of the High Peace Council, a government body tasked with organizing peace talks with the Taliban insurgency. It cited an unsuccessful Taliban attempt on June 21 to assassinate Mo-

hammad Masoom Stanekzai, who heads the Peace Council.

The experts said the emergence and growing importance of radical splinter groups such as Da Fidayano Mahaz show the seriousness of the internal conflict within the Taliban. They pointed to a declaration on Da Fidayano's website that it was seeking the death of all those involved in an initiative in Qatar to organize peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government.

The monitoring team also reported "a distinct increase" in the activities and visibility of al-Qaida affiliates in Afghanistan in 2014.

It said that according to information provided by Afghan officials to the team in mid-2014, Taliban leaders were concerned that the success of the Islamic State terrorist group — also known as ISIL — would draw potential Taliban recruits to fight in Syria and Iraq.

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NATION



A woman passes movie posters displayed at the Landmark Sunshine Cinema on Wednesday in New York.

MARK LENNING/AP

'Mouse that roared' back in the spotlight

BY PAUL ALEXANDER
Stars and Stripes

Remember that mousy loner in school who did weird stuff just to get attention, had a hulking big brother who kept him from getting beat up, grew into a lunch-money extortionist who flashed knives and was the chief suspect in a lot of neighborhood crime?

While he may have gotten bad grades, he was smarter than most people thought, particularly when it came to devious plots. He developed a long rap sheet that kept him

ANALYSIS familiar with the police, but no one knew how to punish him without making him even more recalcitrant and dangerous.

Sounds a lot like North Korea. It's back in the cherished spotlight, with the FBI saying Friday it had solid evidence that North Korea was behind the hack attack against Sony Pictures, apparently in retribution for the Seth Rogen-James Franco movie "The Interview." The film made light of a fictional assassination plot against North Korea's youthful leader, Kim Jong Un. Sony has scrapped the film, which had been set for a Christmas release, after the hackers threatened theaters showing it.

Tight controls on information from the reclusive country hamper efforts at visualizing life behind the closed doors. What does emerge makes it sound like maybe the weirdest place on earth, where almost any outrage seems possible.

So when word came a year ago that youthful dictator Kim Jong Un's uncle had been executed, no one was really surprised, even when rumors emerged that the uncle had been fed to hungry dogs. The rumors have since been discredited, but it says a lot that people were willing to accept them as possible.

This is a country that some call the world's longest experiment in brainwashing, where a stadium full of people can burst into tears at the mere mention of a deceased leader — with reported punishment for those who don't — and internal espionage goes down to the family level.

The third-generation communist dynasty is promoted with godlike reverence. The biblical story of Jesus' birth was rewritten for Kim's father, Kim Jong Il, who North Korea media reported shot a 38-under-par, with 11 aces, the first time he played an 18-hole golf course.

Such audacious claims have generated chuckles outside the country. But North Korea's development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missile technology has long worried the world, and having China as its big brother provides the bravado to make belligerent threats against the United States and South Korea.

The country has essentially become a real version of "The Mouse that Roared," a 1959 Peter Sellers film in which a fictional poor country declares war on the United States in hopes of getting aid. It wouldn't be surprising, given Kim Jong Il's purported fascination with movies, and the North repeatedly has used such brinkmanship to wring aid from the West.

Efforts to get North Korea to shelve its weapons programs and join the international community have failed, though it has played along occasionally, buying time to improve its technology. Now, the next time it shows willingness to sit down to talks, it almost certainly will demand to do so as a recognized nuclear power and refuse to give up that clout.

There long have been rumors of North Korean involvement in counterfeiting U.S. currency and trafficking in drugs. More recently, North Korean defectors have claimed that developing hacker skills has become a major priority for the country.

The Sony computer intrusions follow allegations that North Korea was behind at least six major hack attacks on South Korea's banks, government offices and media since 2007, along with numerous other attempts.

Protecting against cyberattacks has become a major industry around the world, and the U.S. military is in the process of setting up its own cyberforce with a target of 6,000 servicemembers by 2016. They clearly will be needed to fend off assaults from mice like North Korea.

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N. Korea formally blamed by US for hacking attack

BY ERIC TUCKER
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration on Friday formally accused the North Korean government of being responsible for the devastating hacking attack against Sony Pictures Entertainment, providing the most detailed accounting to date of a hugely expensive break-in that could lead to a U.S. response.

The FBI said in a statement it has enough evidence to conclude that North Korea was behind the punishing breach, which resulted in the disclosure of tens of thousands of leaked emails and other materials.

"North Korea's actions were intended to inflict significant harm on a U.S. business and suppress the right of American citizens to express themselves. Such acts of intimidation fall outside the bounds of acceptable state behavior," the statement said.

The FBI's statement cited, among other factors, technical similarities between the Sony break-in and past "malicious cyber activity" linked directly to North Korea, including a prior cyberattack against South Korean banks and media. The Sony breach, reported in late November, involved the use of destruc-

tive malware that caused the studio to take its entire computer network offline and left thousands of computers inoperable.

'North Korea's actions were intended to inflict significant harm on a U.S. business and suppress the right of American citizens to express themselves.'

FBI

The break-in has had wide-ranging ramifications for the studio, spilling into public view candid and confidential discussions among executives and leading to lawsuits from those who say

their personal and financial data was exposed online. This week, the attack escalated with terrorist threats against moviegoers that prompted Sony to cancel the Christmas release of the movie "The Interview," which for months had been harshly condemned by the North Korean government.

Sony now says it has no plans to release the film, a comedy about a plot to assassinate North Korea's leader, Kim Jong Un.

After Sony canceled the film's release, hackers sent a new email praising the studio's decision as "very wise" and saying its data would be safe "as long as you make no more trouble."

The message warned the studio to "never" release the film "in any form," including on DVD. The email was confirmed Friday by a person close to the studio who wasn't authorized to speak publicly about the matter and requested anonymity. An FBI spokesman said authorities are aware of the email and are investigating.

North Korea has denied being responsible but earlier this month referred to the cyberattack as a "righteous deed." A North Korean diplomat to the United Nations, Kim Un Chol, declined to comment Friday about the FBI's accusations.

Obama administration officials had until Friday declined to openly blame North Korea, but had said they were weighing various options for a response. The statement Friday did not reveal what options were being considered but did say the government would look to "impose costs and consequences."

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NATION

Colo. vows to defend pot law against states' suit

By SADIE GURMAN
AND GRANT SCHULTE
The Associated Press

DENVER — Colorado's top law enforcement official promises to vigorously defend the state's historic law legalizing marijuana after Nebraska and Oklahoma asked the U.S. Supreme Court to declare it unconstitutional, saying the drug is freely flowing into neighboring states.

The two states filed a lawsuit seeking a court order to prevent Colorado from enforcing the measure, known as Amendment 64, which was approved by voters in 2012 and allows recreational marijuana for adults over 21. The complaint says the measure runs afoul of federal law and therefore violates the Constitution's supremacy clause, which says federal laws trump state laws.

Colorado Attorney General John Suthers said the lawsuit was without merit.

"Because neighboring states have expressed concern about Colorado-grown marijuana coming into their states, we are not entirely surprised by this action," he said. "However, it appears the plaintiffs' primary grievance stems from nonenforcement of federal laws regarding marijuana, as opposed to choices made by the voters of Colorado."

The lawsuit says Colorado marijuana flows into neighboring states, undermining their efforts to enforce their anti-marijuana laws.

This contraband has been heavily trafficked into our state," Nebraska Attorney General Jon Bruning said at a news conference in Lincoln. "While Colorado reaps millions from the sale of pot, Nebraska taxpayers have to bear the cost."

Colorado has raised more than \$60 million in taxes, licenses and fees from medical and recreational marijuana, which has been sold in stores since January.

The lawsuit says the sales have

strained Nebraska and Oklahoma's finances and legal systems. Police are spending more time and money making arrests, housing inmates, impounding vehicles, seizing drugs and handling other problems related to Colorado pot. Bruning, a Republican, blamed U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder for failing to enforce the federal law's ban on drugs in Colorado.

In a policy statement last year, the U.S. Justice Department noted it doesn't have the resources to police all violations of federal marijuana law. It laid out eight federal law enforcement priorities

‘While Colorado reaps millions from the sale of pot, Nebraska taxpayers have to bear the cost.’

Jon Bruning
Nebraska attorney general

suit doesn't contain statistics to support the claim.

Law enforcement agencies have long said anecdotally that they are feeling the impacts of Colorado's legal weed, making more marijuana arrests and seizing more of the drug.

But there's no way to know exactly how much legal pot is leaving Colorado.

The Rocky Mountain High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area wrote in a recent report that the amount of Colorado pot seized on highways increased from an annual average of 2,763 pounds between 2005 and 2008 to a yearly average of 3,690 pounds from 2009 to 2013. The weed was head-



NAT HARKIN/AP

Nebraska Attorney General Jon Bruning announced Thursday that he and Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt are filing a lawsuit in the U.S. Supreme Court seeking a declaration that Colorado's legalization of marijuana violates the U.S. Constitution.

ed for at least 40 different states.

Scotts Bluff County Sheriff Mark Overman, in western Nebraska, said Colorado marijuana is extra potent, making it worth more in his region and giving sellers a greater financial incentive to do business there.

"I think this is overdue, and I think other states should jump on board," Overman said of the lawsuit. "I'm very frustrated. I take an oath of office, as does every other police officer in this country. I don't just get to pick and choose which laws I enforce."

Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper told The Denver Post he spoke with Nebraska and Oklahoma officials about their concerns. "I'm not sure filing a lawsuit is the most constructive way to find a solution to whatever issues they are," he said.

known the state currently faces a deficit the governor's office puts at \$329 million but others say could be higher.

"You started with an outstanding state, but you have burned it and polished it and, most importantly, you have gotten people involved," the president said.

The governor said those words meant a lot to him. The state's first black governor, Patrick himself has been mentioned as a possible future White House contender, though he has ruled out a bid in 2016.

As the call ended, Braude poked fun at the president over past reports of 17 parking tickets he racked up while attending Harvard. Obama assured the host he had paid them all.

"Otherwise I wouldn't be able to step into the Commonwealth without getting arrested," he joked.

Strange weather lingers in Alaska

By RACHEL D'ORO
The Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — A week before Christmas, Alaska's largest city should look like a postcard wonderland, and the last place you'd expect to see equipment making snow.

"We want Santa to bring snow, soon," Terry Goodwin said as she hit a ski trail in Anchorage on Thursday near snowmaking machines churning out the white stuff.

A picturesque northern winter-scape is hardly the reality here as a spate of weird weather lingers in Anchorage, which is almost 2 feet behind the snowfall totals typical by this time. With just days to go until solstice Sunday, signals the official start of winter, bare ground can be seen in places, and temperatures have been averaging in the 30s, prompting a few hardy residents to take to the streets in T-shirts and shorts.

For the most part, it's even been too warm to make snow for local ski haunts because the machines would churn out slush. However, a slight dip in temperatures allowed the Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage to manufacture powder Thursday on trails at the city's Kincaid Park. That will have to do until nature provides its own supply.

"It's one of those things we have to weather through. Pardon the pun," said Craig Norman, a trail

groomer for the association.

By this time of year, Anchorage normally has nearly 30.9 inches of snowfall, according to National Weather Service meteorologist Bill Ludwig. But the city has seen 10.3 inches this season from just two measurable snowfalls, with much of that melted down to a thin layer in many places.

December has seen above-normal temperatures every day so far, although Thursday's high of 26 degrees came close to the norm of 25. Wednesday's high temperature was 36 degrees. To date, the average temperatures for the month have been more than 8 degrees above normal, Ludwig said. The average low for December so far is nearly 23 degrees, compared with the normal low of 13.

A pressure system that has pushed warmer weather to the north more than usual is a factor in the extended warming spell, according to Ludwig. Coastal water temperatures near Alaska also have been between 5 degrees and 8 degrees above normal at times this year, he said.

There's no bitter cold in the foreseeable forecast, either, with temperatures expected to be above or near normal through the end of the year, Ludwig said. There's a decent chance of snow sometime next week, but probably not the big heaping mounds that would bring out hordes of winter recreationists.



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Obama calls Mass. governor's radio show

By BOB SALSBERG
The Associated Press

BOSTON — Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick has fielded calls on hundreds of subjects during his monthly "Ask the Governor" radio show. But this call was one of a kind.

The president, this is Barack Obama — formerly of Somerville, the caller began Thursday. "I've got a few complaints about service in and around the neighborhood, but I've moved down South since that time."

The president was indeed calling in to WGBH-FM to congratulate Patrick, a friend and political ally who's wrapping up two terms in office. Obama once lived in the Boston suburb of Somerville while attending Harvard Law School.

Patrick sounded surprised and initially unconvinced that it really was Obama on the phone and not

an impersonator. And he gently chided the president for a slight stumble in pronouncing the state's name.

"You know, there's a little slip thing that develops when I say Massachusetts. I know how to spell it, though," Obama joked.

"Indeed you do," responded Patrick. "And you know where it is. You've been a great friend to all of us. Thank you."

It was Patrick's last "Ask the Governor" segment, a once-a-month part of a talk show hosted by Jim Braude and Margery Eagan. The Democrat, who did not seek re-election, leaves office Jan. 8. His successor is Charlie Baker, a Republican.

Obama praised Patrick for the state's success in student achievement, health care access, clean energy and having a balanced budget, though on that final count the president may not have

NATION

Bondage 'master' guilty in plot to kill wife

By COREY WILLIAMS
The Associated Press

DETROIT — A Detroit-area man was convicted Thursday of murder in a plot to kill his wife so he could devote himself to a life of bondage and domination in an upper-class suburb with women who called him "Master Bob."

The salacious trial of Bob Bashara revealed his secret life in Grosse Pointe Park: a former Rotary Club president who used cocaine and hosted men and women at a sex dungeon under a bar called the Hard Luck Lounge.

Jane Bashara was strangled by a handyman in the couple's garage in 2012 before her body was discovered in her Mercedes-Benz

in a Detroit alley.

"The system worked. We finally have closure for the death of Jane Bashara,"

Grosse Pointe Park Police Chief David Hiller said after jurors convicted Bob Bashara, 57, of first-degree murder and four other charges. "On behalf of Jane's family and the residents of Grosse Pointe Park, we are finally able to put this to rest."

Bashara showed no visible emo-



Bashara

tions as he stood while the jury foreman read the verdict. One of his lawyers, Michael McCarthy, later said, "He's in shock, very disappointed in the verdict."

Bashara is scheduled to be sentenced on Jan. 15. First-degree murder carries a mandatory penalty of life in prison without possibility of parole.

Judge Vonda Evans showered praise on the jurors, saying, "I am at a loss for words to say how much we appreciate how much you've done."

Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy said she hoped that the verdict "gives the family of Jane Bashara some respite."

In closing arguments, assistant prosecutor Rob Moran asked ju-

rors, "What man would make his own elderly mother hide a gun for him? What kind of man has two women come to the marital bed and have sex with them while his wife is out of town?"

"Is that what a man does who's in love with his wife? No. It's the ultimate act of betrayal," he said.

Jane Bashara was a marketing executive with a long record of service to her church and community. Nearly three years after her murder, there still are lawn signs that say, "Justice For Jane."

Handyman Joe Gentz pleaded guilty to second-degree murder in 2012 and said Bob Bashara coerced him into committing the crime. But as Bashara's trial was

set to begin in October, Gentz said he wouldn't testify.

Bashara didn't testify either, but repeatedly professed his innocence in the weeks after his wife's death, even attending a candlelight vigil.

Defense attorneys urged the jury to keep their focus on Gentz, not Bob Bashara. They said Bashara could have continued his affairs and lifestyle without getting rid of his wife.

"She is the breadwinner," Michael McCarthy said in his final remarks. "Why would he want her dead? ... There is reasonable doubt in this trial."

Bashara is already in prison for trying to have Gentz killed in jail in 2012.

US not fully prepared for nuclear terror attack

By HOPE YEN
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. government isn't fully prepared to handle a nuclear terrorist attack or a large-scale natural catastrophe, lacking effective coordination, and in some cases is years away from ensuring adequate emergency shelter and medical treatment, congressional investigators have found.

The report by the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office, obtained by The Associated Press before its release, found that the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) didn't always keep track of disaster efforts by agencies, hampering the nation's preparedness even after Superstorm Sandy in 2012. That storm hit much of the eastern U.S., including New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania, which received federal disaster money.

"FEMA is not aware of the full range of information," according to the report. The investigation relied partly on internal documents from the Homeland Security Department, which oversees FEMA, including previously undisclosed details from a 2013 disaster plan that highlights needed improvements in the event of an attack from an improvised nuclear device.

The Government Accountability Office said it would still take one to five years to develop a strategy to determine whether people were exposed to unsafe levels of radiation and five to 10 years to plan for a full medical response. Guidance also was lacking as to communication among first responders and making shelters and other basic needs available.

Investigators said FEMA, which leads an interagency group in creating a disaster response plan, needs to set clear deadlines and estimated costs to ensure that agencies fulfill the goals.



PROVIDED BY WHDH-TV Boston/AP

Boston Marathon bombing suspect Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, center, is transferred between vehicles in Devens, Mass., following his hearing in federal court Thursday in Boston.

Boston bombing suspect Tsarnaev in court for first time since 2013

By DENISE LAVOIE
The Associated Press

BOSTON — Boston Marathon bombing suspect Dzhokhar Tsarnaev returned to court Thursday for the first time since he was arraigned in July 2013. Security was tight, tensions ran high and one bombing victim had a testy exchange with protesters outside.

U.S. District Court George O'Toole Jr. made no rulings during Tsarnaev's final pretrial conference, saying he would rule in writing on pending motions, including the defense's latest push to move the trial out of Boston.

David Bruck, one of Tsarnaev's lawyers, told the judge that the defense plans to file a motion to delay the trial, which is now scheduled to begin on Jan. 5 with jury selection. Bruck did not say how long of a delay the defense will seek.

Three people were killed and more than 260 were injured when two bombs exploded near the finish line of the April 2013 marathon. Tsarnaev, who has pleaded not guilty to 30 federal charges, faces the possibility of the death penalty if he is convicted.

At one point during the hearing, the mother-in-law of Ibragim Todashev, who was shot and killed while being questioned by law enforcement after the bombings, called out to Tsarnaev in Russian in the courtroom. Elena Teyser said she told him: "We pray for you. Be strong, my son. We know you are innocent."

Later, in English, she yelled to the law enforcement officers escorting her out of the room: "Stop killing innocent people. Stop killing innocent boys."

Tsarnaev, 21, never flinched or acknowledged the shouts. He wore a black sweater and gray trousers and had a scruffy beard and a curly hairstyle similar to the one seen in earlier photos. He smiled to his attorneys and one patted him on the arm.

At his last court appearance 17 months ago, Tsarnaev still bore signs of the bloody standoff with police that led to his capture and the death of his older brother, Tamerlan. His left arm was in a cast, his face was swollen and he appeared to have a jaw injury. In court Thursday, he had no visible injuries.

'No Social Security for Nazis' is now law

By RICHARD LARDNER,
DAVID RISING
AND RANDY HERSCHAFT
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama on Thursday capped a swift and forceful response to an Associated Press investigation by signing into law a measure that bars suspected Nazi war criminals from receiving U.S. Social Security benefits.

The AP's investigation, which was the impetus for the No Social Security for Nazis Act, found that dozens of former Nazis collected millions of dollars in retirement benefits after being forced to leave the United States. Recipients ranged from the SS guards who patrolled the Third Reich's network of camps where millions of Jews died to a rocket scientist who helped develop the V-2 rocket that Nazi Germany used to attack London.

The speed with which the legislation moved underscored the outrage the AP's findings triggered among lawmakers on Capitol Hill — and American taxpayers. The House unanimously approved the bill Dec. 2 and the Senate passed it by voice vote just two days later.

The bill signed into law by Obama terminates Social Security payments for individuals stripped of their American citizenship due to their participation in Nazi persecution during World War II. U.S. law previously mandated a higher threshold — a

final order of deportation — before a person's Social Security benefits could be terminated.

By lowering the threshold to loss of citizenship, a step known as denaturalization, the bill effectively shuts a loophole that for years had allowed suspected Nazis to continue receiving benefits even after being expelled from the U.S. for their roles in Third Reich's atrocities.

The AP found that since 1979, at least 38 of 66 suspects removed from the United States kept their Social Security benefits. Many of these former Nazis got into the U.S. after the war by lying about their pasts and eventually became U.S. citizens.

Rabbi Marvin Hier, founder of the Simon Wiesenthal Center and an outspoken advocate for closing the loophole, said he felt vindicated.

"I'm delighted and I think it's the right thing to do," he said in a telephone interview from his office in Los Angeles. "As I've said before, for those who say it's a form of collective punishment that also punishes their families, that's the problem of the Nazi who lied about his past and made my problem."

Among those whose benefits will be cut off because of the new law are Jakob Denzinger, a former Auschwitz guard, and Martin Hartmann, a former guard at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in Germany. Their cases were described in the AP's investigation, which was published in October.

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NATION

Panel calls for deep changes at Secret Service

JERRY MARKON
AND CAROL D. LEONNIG
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — An independent panel on Thursday recommended sweeping changes at the Secret Service, saying the elite protective agency is “starved for leadership,” and called for an outsider as director, hundreds of new agents and officers and a higher fence around the White House.

The panel, created in October after a series of highly publicized security failures, said the fence protecting the executive mansion should be raised at least 4 feet to make it less vulnerable to jumpers. Panel members were reacting to a Sept. 19 incident in which a man scaled the fence and ran far into the White House through an unlocked front door.

The four-person body also urged expanded, intensified training for agents, saying they should run crisis response scenarios that possibly use a mock White House. The report especially targeted the Secret Service’s highly insular culture, calling for new leadership from outside to shake up the agency, a suggestion sure to rankle some in the service’s old guard.

“The problems exposed by recent events go deeper than a new fence can fix,” said the report’s executive summary, the only portion publicly released. “We believe that at this time in the agency’s history, the need for Service experience is outweighed by what the Service needs today: dynamic leadership that can move the Service forward into a new era and drive change in the organization.”

The sharply worded document comes after a cascade of security

and other problems, including the agency’s fumbling response in November 2011

“The problems exposed by recent events go deeper than a new fence can fix.”

Panel report executive summary

“Keystone Cops” failures of the once highly regarded agency. She resigned the following day, amid

reports of yet another major security lapse — an armed private security guard who was allowed onto an elevator with President Barack Obama in September.

Joseph Clancy, the former head of Obama’s security detail, was called back out of retirement to be interim director.

The report will surely not be the final word on reforming the storied service, which was first created in 1865 to combat counterfeiters during the Civil War. A House committee will launch a broader, bipartisan investigation into the Secret Service’s operations in the coming year, and there is widespread debate in Congress over whether the Department of Homeland Security has provided proper leadership of the agency, which was placed inside the department after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

“A serious and robust investigation must include cooperation on both sides of the aisle in order to root out systemic problems and implement proper reforms,” Reps. Jason Chaffetz, R-Utah, and Elijah Cummings, D-Md., said of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee probe they are planning to launch into the Secret Service.

“Every day honorable men and women put their lives on the line to protect the president, first family, and others within the administration. There’s no room for mistakes,” Chaffetz and Cummings added in an unusual joint statement. They said their investigation “will examine security breaches ... as well as focus on overall leadership, staffing, culture, protocol, technology, tactics and training issues.”

\$349M NASA project shut down as useless

By David A. FAHRENTHOLD
The Washington Post

GULFPORT, Miss. — In June, NASA finished work on a huge construction project here in Mississippi: a \$349 million laboratory tower designed to test a new rocket engine in a chamber that mimicked the vacuum of space.

Then NASA did something odd. As soon as the work was done, it shut the tower down. The project was officially “mothballed” — closed up and left empty — without ever being used.

“You look the door so nobody gets in and hurts themselves,” said Daniel Dumbacher, a former NASA official who oversaw the project.

The reason for the shutdown: The new tower — called the A-3 test stand — was useless, just as expected. The rocket program it was designed for had been canceled in 2010.

But at first, cautious NASA bureaucrats didn’t want to stop the construction on their own authority. And then Congress — at the urging of a senator from Mississippi — swooped in and ordered the agency to finish the tower, no matter what.

The result was that NASA spent four more years building something it didn’t need. Now, the agency will spend about \$700,000 a year to maintain it in disuse.

The empty tower in Mississippi is evidence of a breakdown at NASA, which used to be a glorious symbol of what an American bureaucracy could achieve. In the space race days of the 1960s, the agency was given a clear, galvanizing mission: Reach the moon within the decade. In less than seven, NASA got it done.

Now, NASA has become a symbol of something else: what happens to a big bureaucracy after its mission of mission starts to fade.

In the past few years, presidents have repeatedly scrubbed and rewritten NASA’s goals. The moon

was in. The moon was out. Mars was in. Now, Mars looks like a stretch. Today, the first goal is to visit an asteroid.

Jerked from one mission to another, NASA lost its sense that any mission was truly urgent. It began to absorb the vices of less-glamorous bureaucracies: Officials tended to let projects run over time and budget. Its congressional overseers tended to view NASA first as a means to deliver pork back home and, second, as a means to deliver Americans into space.

In Mississippi, NASA built a monument to its own institutional drift.

The useless tower was repeatedly approved by people who, in essence, argued that the American space program had nothing better to do.

“What the hell are they doing? I mean, that’s a lot of people’s hard-earned money,” said David Forshee, who spent 18 months as the general foreman for the pipe fitters who helped build the tower. Like other workmen, he had taken pride in this massive, complicated project — only to learn that it was in limbo.

“Seven years ago, when the tower still seemed like a useful idea, the governor came to the groundbreaking. So did a congressman. Two senators. On a hot morning in August 2007, next to a canal full of alligators, somebody laid down Astro-Turf and clean dirt over the sandy Mississippi soil. The dignitaries stood on the fake grass. They stuck gold-painted shovels into the fake earth. They said they were starting one of the greatest journeys in human history.

Right here — at a 30-story tower rising out of the woods — NASA would test the rockets that would take Americans back to the moon — and then even farther, on to Mars.

This tower was intended to test a rocket engine called the J-2X.



Courtesy of NASA

The A-3 test stand is under construction at NASA's Stennis Space Center in Mississippi in 2013.

The plan was for a spacecraft to carry this engine, unlift, up out of the Earth’s atmosphere. Then the engine would ignite and propel the spacecraft toward the moon.

But before NASA stuck an astronaut on top of that idea, it wanted to test the engine. In the near-vacuum at the edge of space, would the whole thing vibrate, crack or blow apart?

There was only one way to know. “You have to fake the vacuum,” said Dumbacher, the former NASA official.

To do that, NASA had to create a giant pressure cooker on stilts thrust from a rocket. It consisted of a sealed metal container, big enough to hold a school bus. Then they would install it in the middle of a 300-foot-tall steel tower, reinforced to resist 1 million pounds of upward thrust from a rocket.

Then they would put the rocket engine in the container, seal the door, suck out the air and light the fire.

At the very beginning, NASA projected that the tower would cost \$119 million. It was supposed to be finished by late 2010.

Back in Washington, it wasn’t long after the groundbreaking that NASA officials began to hear about problems with the project.

“What the hell are they doing? I mean, that’s a lot of people’s hard-earned money.”

David Forshee
foreman

ing Group, blamed changes in the design, plus unforeseen increases in the cost of labor and steel.

NASA paid the higher price. The builders kept building.

At NASA, as at other large government agencies, this was an old institutional vice: making a big purchase, then letting the cost

get bigger and bigger. Studies had found that when NASA projects ran way late or way over budget, the agency rarely took the hard step of killing them.

“The (International) Space Station was sold as an \$8 billion program. It ended up costing \$100 billion. The Webb telescope was sold as a \$1 billion program. It’s now up to \$8 billion,” said Lori Garver, who served as the number two official at NASA from 2009 until last year. “It usually works out for them.” She said, meaning the contractors get paid even when they raise the price.

In the final years of the project, word began to filter out on the job site: The thing they were working on might not be needed after all. Not for Mars. Not for anything.

“Yeah, yeah. It was a pretty strange feeling, to know that we were working on a project that, you know, seemed like that was just the local politician’s pet project but didn’t necessarily fit into the national scheme. Well, I don’t think the rank and file really had a morale issue with that. You know, to them, it was another construction project,” said Joel Ellis, a contractor who helped install the pipe. “Work on the tower finally concluded this past summer. By then, the project had cost \$349 million, which was nearly three times the original NASA estimate. It had lasted almost seven years, which was 3½ years longer than first expected. But at last, the A-3 test stand was done.

The fact that the tower was going to be mothballed was revealed in an inspector general’s report in January.

The inspector general said it doesn’t seem likely to be needed anytime soon. NASA says it has no rockets, even in development, that would require the kind of test this tower does.

So the tower stand has taken its place on NASA’s long list of living dead. Last year, the agency’s inspector general found six other test stands that were either in “mothball” status or about to be. Some hadn’t been used since the 1990s. Together, those seven cost NASA more than \$100,000 a year to maintain.

NATION



Clockwise from top: Hospital scrubs for a child from the National Institutes of Health, a "chum" bag with commemorative coins from the Drug Enforcement Administration, an astronaut pen, a one-piece infant outfit from the CIA and a coffee mug from the National Security Agency are among the holiday gifts available at federal gift shops.

PHOTOS BY BILL O'LEARY/The Washington Post



Gifts of cheer from your friendly federal agency

FBI, CIA and NIH offer unlikely last-minute shopping opportunities

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Trim your tree with an Ebola stuffed toy in the shape of the spindly virus, from the gift shop at the National Institutes of Health.

Buy your loved one the perfect present for that decadent holiday getaway, a plush beach towel embroidered with the emblem of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Or a National Security Agency coffee mug decorated with encrypted messages. They decipher themselves when warm liquid is poured into the cup.

And for the would-be space traveler: NASA's freeze-dried Neapolitan ice cream. A slab of the dehydrated treat has a three-year shelf life, some dusty flavors, and a buttery aftertaste.

Welcome to the vast world of federal agency gift shops, where you can fill your cart with whimsy and irony.

A festive federal shopping list could look something like this: an inflatable NASA astronaut; sheets of \$2 bills from the Bureau of Engraving and Printing; a gavel-shaped pencil with a two-headed eraser from the Supreme Court; and a hand-cranked weather radio from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Because if the grid goes down, "this will keep giving you tornado and flooding warnings," chuckled Chris Vaccaro, a spokesman with the National Weather Service, who has bought at least six holiday radios over the years for his relatives. "It's very Washington. But it's also just very cool."

The top seller at the Drug Enforcement Administration are "chum bags," black pouches filled with collectable coins from the agency's offices around the world. The Afghan coin, for instance, is embossed with opium poppies and a sniper.

At times, this swag is used to thank local law enforcement partners. A DEA agent

showed up at the Arlington, Va., store on a recent afternoon to buy Christmas chum bags for several members of the British special forces, who, he said "saved my hide, in Afghanistan."

And then there's the shop inside the Central Intelligence Agency, which sells an assortment of presents, including cuff links, golf balls and onesies for infants, all emblazoned with the CIA emblem. The onesies are made in Pakistan, which happens to be the primary location of the agency's counterterrorism drone strikes.

The NIH and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, headquartered in Atlanta, are supplied by a company called Giant Microbes, which sells a "stocking book of ornaments." It includes penicillin, a blue stuffed toy that looks like a squid, the salmonella bacterium, a log with red flowing strings; and a stuffed red-blood cell. A company called CafePress.com also sells an Ebola ornament online.

These playful expressions of pestilence are rooted in science, which is at the heart of the agencies' missions, said Randy Schoole, who heads NIH's five gift shops. He said the gifts are a great way to capture in a single toy what his agency is all about.

They often reflect the latest health challenges. Bedbugs, rendered as flat, bright-red creatures with antennae, were big a few years back. So was the black-caped "superbug" a takeoff on the antibiotic-resistant MRSA bacteria, which has been spreading with alarming speed. And this year, there's been a run on Ebola.

While there is an abundance of prosaic government stocking stuffers — key chains, pens, golf balls, mouse pads — there are also classier collectibles.

The Supreme Court, for instance, produces a new Christmas ornament annually. This year's is a three-dimensional rendering of the court building, silver-plated with white accents.

It's for sale alongside the book "Yoga for Lawyers," which contains pictures of poses for "the chronically stressed and hunched over," and the board game "Lawsuit!"

Jim Lumsden works with a company that supplies shops at several national security and law enforcement agencies, where there are limits not only on who can get into those stores — often only employees or guests with an escort — but on what is tasteful to sell.

The DEA gift shop, at agency headquarters across from the Pentagon City Mall, won't sell cigarette lighters or shot glasses, although those items are staples of other federal gift shops.

"That would be bad. We have to be careful with that sort of stuff," said Lumsden, a designer with API, which makes and supplies gift items.

That agency's store, however, does sell a onesie that reads, "DEA: I'm gonna bust the bad guys, right after my nap." And bumper stickers that say, "Stay off the grass," with a red line through a marijuana leaf.

The FBI gift shop sold glow-in-the-dark boxer shorts with the bureau logo for a while. "Those were on the edge," he said.

Conservatives urging right not to serve gay customers

The Washington Post

Conservative lawmakers in some states nationwide are pushing to expand the right of individuals and businesses not to provide certain services to same-sex couples on religious grounds.

In North Carolina, for example, a state legislator has proposed allowing government workers to recuse themselves from issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples even though such unions are now legal. A bill in Texas would permit voters to amend the state constitution in a way that supporters say would enhance religious liberty but critics warn would harm the civil rights of gays and others.

A legislative fight is underway in Michigan, where the state House recently passed a set of contentious religious-liberty bills, including some that would allow adoption agencies to refuse placements that violate their faith.

The wave of proposed legislation comes at a time of major gains for the gay community, with same-sex couples now allowed to marry in 35 states and the District of Columbia. The rapid shifts in the legal landscape have sparked a backlash from religious conservatives, who say the gains have gone beyond helping gays and are now infringing on the rights of those who oppose same-sex marriage for religious reasons.

A number of small-business owners around the country, such as bakers and photographers, have been fined or otherwise penalized for declining services to same-sex couples seeking to marry.

"As more states have marriage that includes two men or two women, more people are going to be confronted with a decision. Do I follow my conscience, politely decline to participate in a same-sex celebration and be punished? Or do I surrender my freedom to live and work faithfully at the government's command?" said Greg Scott, spokesman for Alliance Defending Freedom, a conservative legal group that is advising state legislatures and represents about half a dozen business owners.

Groups on both sides of the issue are preparing for even more battles next year, after most states open their legislative sessions. In anticipation of further bills, gay rights groups have begun pushing back, hiring lobbyists and telling local chambers of commerce that the legislation could damage the states' reputations.

Business opposition was critical to the failure earlier this year of a similar measure in Arizona that critics had dubbed a "right to discriminate" bill.

That measure, which would have allowed businesses to refuse service to gays on religious grounds, passed the state legislature but was vetoed by Republican Gov. Jan Brewer after a significant backlash, including from the National Football League, which has suggested it might move the Super Bowl out of Arizona in 2015.

Critics of the bills say they could set far-reaching precedents. For example, they caution, a man charged with domestic violence could argue that it is part of his religion to keep his wife in line or a taxpayer-funded homeless shelter could be permitted to turn away a Muslim family.

They argue, however, that gay and transgender people are the primary targets of these bills and that the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community is particularly vulnerable because many states do not explicitly ban discrimination against them.

'It's very Washington. But it's also just very cool.'

Chris Vaccaro

a spokesman with the National Weather Service on federal agency gifts

NATION

For US and Cuba, normalcy will take many steps

By MATTHEW LEE
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — How does one end almost 54 years of hostility toward a next-door neighbor?

That's about to become clear as the Obama administration and the communist government of Raul Castro move to normalize more than a half-century of bitter animosity between the United States and Cuba.

It won't happen overnight. Some of the likely steps:

■ **Restoring full diplomatic ties:** While international relations can be subject to laws passed by Congress, the White House enjoys broad discretion in diplomatic recognition. An exchange of diplomatic notes between Washington and Havana would be enough to normalize diplomatic relations, but that must be preceded by agreement on a series of separate understandings that would govern other tones.

High-level discussions to reach those understandings will begin in late January in Havana as part of previously scheduled U.S.-Cuba immigration talks. The top U.S. diplomat for the Americas, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Roberta Jacobson, will lead the administration's delegation. Jacobson told reporters on Thursday that the process is in many ways "mechanical" and will not be contingent on reaching accords on areas of deep U.S. concern, notably Cuba's human rights record.

Nor are comprehensive settlements of outstanding U.S. and Cuban legal claims against each other and private companies required for normalization, she said. President Barack Obama and others maintain, though, that improving human rights and resolving other contentious issues, including lawsuits, will remain key U.S. priorities moving forward.

Diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Cuba were severed in 1961, but were partially restored in 1977 with the creation of U.S. and Cuban interests sections staffed by diplomats in the countries' respective capitals. Those facilities are technically under the authority of Switzerland, which serves as what is known as a "protecting power" for both the United States and Cuba in each other's nation.

■ **Reopening the U.S. Embassy in Havana and nominating an ambassador:** As with recognition, the U.S. Constitution gives the executive branch wide discretion in opening and closing diplomatic facilities. But Congress must approve money to pay for them, and Senate confirmation is required for ambassadorial nominations. Several senators opposed to the administration's policy shift have threatened to withhold funding for an embassy in Havana and to block any nominee for ambassador. Because Congress for 37 years has funded the interests section in Havana and for its staff, who provide vital services to Americans and Cubans, administration officials do not believe



Taxi drivers wait for clients Thursday next to their classic American cars in Havana, Cuba.

Congress will block payments to convert the mission to an embassy. The State Department says it plans to use the building in which the current interests section is located, a six-story structure that served as the embassy from 1953 until 1961, and does not expect the change to cost significantly more than what is currently spent.

The ambassador post could be more problematic. A single senator can block a nomination. Administration officials expect that any nominee will face a difficult confirmation process but note that the functions of an ambassador are often carried out by a deputy chief of mission or charge d'affaires.

■ **Ending the U.S. embargo and removing the "state sponsor of terrorism" designation:** The executive branch does not have the power to abolish the 1963 embargo, but it can take steps to mitigate its effect. Ending the embargo would take an act of Congress, and administration

officials admit they are not optimistic that will happen soon. Officials say, however, they believe an easing of sanctions eventually will create conditions in Cuba that will persuade opponents of normalization to vote in favor of ending the embargo.

In addition to the embargo, Cuba is subject to sanctions under other legislation, including its designation in 1982 as a "state sponsor of terrorism." That designation restricts U.S. foreign assistance, bans defense exports and sales, puts controls over exports of dual-use items and sets out numerous financial and travel restrictions. Obama announced he had instructed Secretary of State John Kerry to begin a six-month review of the designation that is required to delist Cuba.

Cuba is also subject to sanctions under the Trading With the Enemy Act, the Helms-Burton Act and other legislation, all of which would require congressional approval to repeal but not

necessarily to ease.

■ **Easing sanctions short of ending the embargo:** Don't rush to Cuba to pick up cigars and rum just yet. The easing of trade, travel and currency restrictions announced on Wednesday will not take effect until the Commerce and Treasury Departments revise the regulations and publish the revisions in the Federal Register. That could take weeks, at least.

The administration says rules on visits to Cuba by Americans will be liberalized to allow for travel in categories that in the past have required special licenses from Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control. Those categories include: family visits, official U.S. or foreign government business, journalism, research and professional meetings, educational and religious activities, performances, workshops, competitions and expeditions and humanitarian support.

Stephen Colbert retiring his 'Report' and the host he played

By FRAZIER MOORE
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — After nine years, Stephen Colbert has left his satirical-news show, retiring the character who served as host — a pompous, conservative scold also known as Stephen Colbert.

The last episode of "The Colbert Report" aired on Comedy Central on Thursday. His next step: playing himself as the new host of CBS' "Late Show" replacing David Letterman, who exits next May.

During the final episode, Colbert was last seen gliding through the clouds in the backseat of Santa's sleigh beside Alex Trebek (don't ask).

Before that, after offing the Grim Reaper and declaring himself immortal (don't ask), he led a glorious singalong in the studio with a room of luminaries ranging from "Daily Show" host Jon



Stephen Colbert appears on "The Colbert Report" in New York.

Stewart, Andy Cohen and Big Bird to George Lucas, Arianna Huffington and Henry Kissinger. With Randy Newman at the

piano, the gathered sang the poignant pop standard whose lyrics gist: "We'll meet again, don't know where, don't know when. But

I know we'll meet again, some sunny day."

"The Colbert Report" (both t's are silent) premiered in October 2005 as a spoof of the show hosted by Fox News Channel personality Bill O'Reilly. But the Colbert character developed into a shrewdly satirical observer, preaching the opposite of what real-life Stephen Colbert meant to say. For this nightly display of Opposite Day, Colbert won a devoted audience of so-called "heretics," plus critical acclaim and two Peabody Awards, which noted that "what started as a parody of punditry is now its own political platform."

An actor, comedian and improv virtuoso, Colbert had created his Stephen Colbert alter ego in 1997 as a "senior correspondent" for Comedy Central's "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart," where he addressed such topics as national security. Shortly after the

Sept. 11, 2001 terror attacks, he instructed anchorman Stewart on the difference between "High Alert" (he came to his feet and began scanning the horizon) and "Higher Alert" (for which he rose on his tippy-toes).

"My character is self-important, poorly informed, well-intentioned but an idiot," Colbert explained on the eve of his eponymous "Report's" debut. "So we said, 'Let's give him a promotion.'"

Along with his commentaries, Colbert had one of TV's broadcast spectrum of guests, ranging from entertainers to intellectuals to the power elite.

Last week, he welcomed President Barack Obama, to whom he posed this question: "Stephen Colbert — great pundit, or the greatest pundit?"

"The greatest pundit," Obama replied.

WORLD

8 children killed, woman stabbed in Australia

By KRISTEN GELINEAU

The Associated Press

SYDNEY — Eight dead children and a woman suffering from stab wounds were found inside a home in a northern Australian city on Friday, police said.

Police believe the 34-year-old woman with chest wounds is the mother of seven of the children, and the eighth child is believed to be one of her relatives, Detective Inspector Bruno Ascinar said. She was receiving treatment for her injuries and was in stable condition at a hospital.

Queensland state police said

they were called to the home in the Cairns suburb of Manoora on Friday morning after receiving a report of a woman with serious injuries. When police got to the house, they found the bodies of the children inside, ranging in age from 18 months to 15 years.

Ascinar declined to say how the children died.

He said he didn't believe there was a multiple murderer still at large and that police were talking to the woman. Asked if she was a suspect, he said officials have not yet identified any suspects and were questioning everyone who had contact with the family in the

past two or three days.

"As it stands at the moment, there's no need for the public to be concerned about this other than the fact that it's a tragic, tragic event," Ascinar said. "The situation is well controlled at the moment. There shouldn't be any concern for anyone else out of this environment."

Lisa Thaiday, who said she was the injured woman's cousin, said one of the woman's other sons, a 20-year-old, came home and found his brothers and sisters dead inside the house.

"I'm going to see him now, he needs comforting," Thaiday

said. "We're a big family ... I just can't believe it. We just found out (about) those poor babies."

The street has been cordoned off and a crime scene will remain in place for at least the next day, Ascinar said.

Dozens of police descended on the home, and crowds of locals stood outside the police barricades, some of them wiping away tears.

"These events are extremely distressing for everyone of course and police officers aren't immune from that — we're human beings as well," Ascinar said.

The tragedy comes as Australia

is still reeling from the shock of a deadly siege in a Sydney cafe earlier this week. On Monday, a gunman burst into a cafe in the heart of the city and took 18 people inside hostage. Two hostages were killed along with the gunman after police stormed in 16 hours later in a bid to end the siege.

"The news out of Cairns is heartbreaking," Prime Minister Tony Abbott said in a statement. "All parents would feel a gut-wrenching sadness at what has happened. This is an unspeakable crime. These are trying days for our country."



LAETITIA NOTARIANN/AP

Russian sailors stand on the Russian navy ship Smolny on Thursday as it leaves the port of Saint-Nazaire, western France.

Ship that France built for Russia now a diplomatic embarrassment

By SYLVIE CORBET
AND ANGELA CHARLTON
The Associated Press

PARIS — Hundreds of Russian sailors pulled out of a French port Thursday, bearing perfumes for their loved ones but lacking the controversial bounty they came for: a 1 billion-euro, French-built warship that has become a hostage to the biggest East-West conflict since the Cold War.

The Vladivostok helicopter carrier is part of a strange and divisive arms deal now on hold — and perhaps on the verge of collapse — because of the conflict in Ukraine. France built it for Russia's navy but is now having second thoughts, notably amid heavy U.S. criticism of the deal.

After months training on the ship, the Russian sailors left the port town of Saint-Nazaire empty-handed. The ship, painted with Cyrillic letters reading "VLADIVOSTOK," floats in

a dock, unused. A second ship meant to be part of the deal is there, too, an expensive diplomatic embarrassment.

A top French official involved in negotiating the sale in 2009, former Defense Minister Herve Morin, is now opposed to it. His change of heart reflects Europe's evolving relationship with Russia, a powerful neighbor, trading partner and energy supplier.

It also reflects divisions inside France.

Then-President Nicolas Sarkozy crafted the sale as much for domestic economic reasons as for geopolitical ones.

The contract saved a shipbuilder at risk of bankruptcy at a time when Sarkozy was trying to shore up the economy. "The Mistral-class deal was viewed as an unexpected lifeline" for STX France, 33 percent owned by the French state, Morin said.

It also fit with Sarkozy's policy

of outreach to authoritarian leaders shunned by the West.

Russia's president at the time, Dmitry Medvedev, called it "a symbol of trust between our countries" as Russia sought to modernize its overstretched and outdated military machine.

The sale of the ships — which could allow Russia to land hundreds of troops quickly on foreign soil — worried Russia's neighbors, including the three Baltic countries in NATO.

Morin, who took part in the negotiations in 2009-10, told The Associated Press, "Some were for and against around the table. In the end, Sarkozy arbitrated, saying: 'We do it.'"

Today, Morin admits he has changed his mind. "It was a political gesture when we signed the deal, it is a political gesture, too, when we deliver it" — or not, he said.

Pakistan forces target militants in wake of massacre

The Associated Press

ISLAMABAD — Pakistani warplanes and ground forces killed at least 77 militants in a northwest-ern tribal region near the Afghan border, officials said Friday, days after Taliban fighters killed 148 people — most of them children — in a school massacre.

Meanwhile, a Pakistani prosecutor said the government will try to cancel the bail granted to the main suspect in the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks — a decision that outraged neighboring India and called into question Pakistan's commitment to fighting militancy.

The violence at a school in Pakistan's northwest earlier this week stunned the country and brought cries for retribution. In the wake of the mass killing the military has struck targets in the Khyber tribal region and has approved the death penalty for six convicted terrorists.

The military said its ground forces late Thursday killed 10 militants while airstrikes killed another 17, including an Uzbek commander. Another 32 alleged terrorists were killed by security forces in an ambush in Tirah valley in Khyber on Friday, as they headed toward the Afghan border, the military said.

On Friday morning, troops

killed 18 more militants during a "cordon-and-search operation" in Khyber, the military said.

The military said the army chief, Gen. Raheel Sharif, was traveling to Khyber on Friday to meet with troops taking part in the ground operation.

Khyber agency is one of two main areas in the northwest where the military has been trying to root out militants in recent months. Khyber borders Peshawar, where the school massacre happened, and militants traditionally have attacked the city before withdrawing to the tribal region where police can't chase them.

The other area is North Waziristan, where the military launched a massive operation in June.

In the southern province of Baluchistan, Pakistani security forces killed a senior Pakistani Taliban leader along with seven of his associates in three separate province raids, said a tribal police officer, Ali Ahmed.

The Pakistani army chief late Thursday signed the death warrants of six "hard-core terrorists" convicted and sentenced to death by military courts, the army said.

It was unclear when the military planned to hang the six men, but authorities generally move quickly once death warrants are signed.

Britain nears allowing women into combat

LONDON — Britain is moving closer to allowing female soldiers to take a role in close combat on the front lines.

Defense Secretary Michael Fallon said Friday he hopes women will soon be allowed to serve in infantry and armored units. He said women can fight as effectively as men.

He has ordered an 18-month review of the physical demands of combat and combat training

to make sure female soldiers will not suffer long-term detrimental effects to their health.

Fallon's support for women in combat comes after a government-commissioned report suggested a change to the policy that has kept women out of close combat while giving them extensive roles in other aspects of military life.

Women already serve as fighter pilots, sailors and submariners but have not been permitted in close combat.

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OPINION

Fear a reasonable response to threat

By STEPHEN CARTER
 Bloomberg News

The decision by Sony Pictures to cancel the Christmas Day opening of "The Interview" a raunchy comedy in which two American journalists try to assassinate North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, has brought the company in for some hard knocks. Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich tweeted, "America has lost its first cyberwar." The Wall Street Journal warned that the cancellation "will set a precedent for further bullying of a notably weak-kneed industry." Well, let's slow down a minute. Sony is a for-profit business. The film division hasn't had a lot of hits lately, and the parent company has had only one profitable year in the past seven. Once theater owners jumped ship after hackers connected to North Korea promised to attack multiplexes that showed the film, Sony didn't have much choice.

It's all very well for the Department of Homeland Security to announce, with a suspicious alacrity, that the threat was credible. It's all very well to point out that computer hackers are rarely violent, or that North Korea doesn't want a shooting war with the United States.

In a poll conducted in September by the Pew Research Center, respondents by 50 percent to 35 percent said the U.S. government has not gone far enough in protecting the country against terrorism. In the same survey, 62 percent reported themselves "very concerned" about the spread of Islamic extremism in the world, and 53 percent expressed similar concerns about what's happening domestically.

Small wonder, then, that even after last week's report from the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, strong majorities of Americans have told pollsters that they favor the use of enhanced interrogation techniques (including, in particular, waterboarding) to seek information from terror suspects. Majorities also continue to oppose

closing the detention site at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. In short words, the oft-predicted nationwide backlash against tough anti-terror policies hasn't materialized.

Fries of misinformation left others dismiss such surveys as colored by irrational fear. But this criticism is uncharitable. Rational people can review the same evidence and reach different conclusions. Given the current state of the world, worry about personal security is an entirely reasonable response.

Consider this week's attack on a Peshawar school by the Pakistani Taliban. More than 140 people died, the great majority of them children. The Pakistani Taliban proudly distributed photographs of the attackers. One might suppose that an attack on Peshawar is not far off from an attack on the United States. But this response misapprehends the competition among terror groups for public attention. In the immediate aftermath of the attack, one Lebanon-based terrorism expert said: "Unfortunately, such violence gets them money, support, and recruits from throughout the world."

This is exactly how the so-called market for martyrs works: There is competition on the demand side for the limited supply of those willing to fight and die for the cause. And the continued existence of the market, despite the best efforts of two consecutive U.S. administrations using various tools to destroy it, provides a perfectly rational reason for worry.

In the market model of terrorism, groups compete fiercely for resources and reputation. The ones that can stage the most spectacular attacks tend to rise out on top. Not so long ago al-Qaida ruled the roost. More recently, Islamic State and Boko Haram have been fighting over which is the more dazzlingly brutal. The Peshawar attack is part of the effort by the Pakistani Taliban to join the big leagues.

If this hellish contest remains fierce, the top prize may well go to the group that can find a way past all the barriers, whether

military or technological, and strike spectacularly at the U.S. homeland. We're the No. 1 attraction, and have been for a long while. As the Senate report notes, in the years after the Sept. 11 attacks, al-Qaida was planning additional terror assaults within U.S. borders. Ironically, our considerable efforts to harden our defenses might make us a more attractive target. It's no accident that both Boko Haram and Islamic State have issued repeated threats against the U.S.

Few experts think the groups possess the capacity to strike here, but that may be beside the point. Terrorism is like any other market. Players over time will innovate to stay ahead of the competition. The day is bound to come when the terror groups decide that swagger alone won't be enough to keep them on top. That's the day they begin planning in earnest.

Against this backdrop, it's perfectly rational to be afraid, and those of us who don't share the fear should at least concede the reasonableness of those who do.

All of which brings us back to "The Interview." Despite all the calls for Sony to stand up to the blackmail in the name of artistic freedom, it seems to me that the criticism is misdirected. Nothing will detect and respond to the reality of fear as swiftly as a market, and here the market has spoken. The relevant market actors are moviegoers. Theater owners are guessing that with "The Interview" in their multiplexes, holiday audiences will stay in droves. From everything.

I'd like to think the owners are mistaken. I'd like to think that were "The Interview" in the theaters, millions of us would flock to the multiplex and watch a movie — any movie — as an act of protest, to show the world we aren't afraid. But I can't say that in predicting the opposite the theater owners have made a wrong call. And if they're right, so is Sony.

Stephen L. Carter, a Bloomberg View columnist, is a professor of law at Yale University.

Not up to US to protect firms from cyberattack

Bloomberg View editorial

Like so many Hollywood movies, North Korea's offensive against Sony Pictures Entertainment could end badly — which is why U.S. officials have to be careful not to overreact.

Theater companies have already succumbed to threats of terrorism by pulling the movie "The Interview" from their schedules. Sony then canceled the release of the film altogether. Note that U.S. officials have claimed North Korea is behind the cyberattack that crippled Sony's computers, some are calling for the government to retaliate. That would be a mistake.

True enough, the North's cyberarmy is a growing threat. By some estimates, it has nearly doubled in size in the past two years. And the attack on Sony displayed a degree of sophistication that Pyongyang's cyberwarriors were not previously known to possess. No doubt, the regime is eager to improve those capabilities further; hackers and malware are much cheaper (and easier to hide) than nuclear centrifuges and ballistic missiles. What's more, the North's cyberwarfare expertise — especially their militaries — are all far more dependent on Internet-based systems than it is, and the "air gap" between its Internet infrastructure and the rest of the world's helps insulate against counterattacks.

Still, Sony and other corporations can't expect the U.S. government to respond to every attack on their behalf. However

embarrassing and costly to the studio, the hacking represents a cybercrime, not an act of cyberterrorism directed at civilians or vital national infrastructure. (By the same token, threats against theaters showing a Hollywood comedy that mocks Kim Jong Un hardly compare with the vows of annihilation that constantly pour out of North Korea's state media.) Companies need to improve their own defenses. In the past, some have squabbled with the government over how much information they should have to share about cyberattacks; they need to get over their reluctance.

What level of attack would prompt a U.S. counterstrike? There's no need for any new red line to be drawn here. It would only help the Kim regime calculate the risk-reward ratio for its cybermischiefs. Ambiguity can help deter North Korea from attempting anything more serious, such as an attack on the U.S.'s critical infrastructure.

This doesn't mean Washington's hands are tied. Previous North Korean cyberattacks have been directed at South Korean banks and airports. Under its existing security commitments, the U.S. should work with Japan and South Korea to bolster their cyber defenses. The U.S. should also join forces to monitor the North's cyberactivities to slow them where possible and perhaps disrupt the next attack.

The one country that could be of the most help to such an effort is China. North Korea's two largest cyberwarfare units are said to be based on mainland China, where they exploit China's more advanced technological

infrastructure. While the Chinese and U.S. governments have their differences on the issue of state-sponsored hacking, China has an overriding interest in stability on the Korean Peninsula. Thus it may be open to reining in these rogue operations, which only raise the risk of conflict in the region.

In all likelihood, the North's cyberattacks will keep growing, especially as its nuclear program comes under greater pressure. At the same time, however, the more wired the country becomes, the more avenues will be established for the outside world to penetrate the regime's information blackout with e-books, downloaded videos, podcasts — the kind of cultural products that have already begun to challenge the state's version of reality. Kim has shown himself to be an impassioned movie critic. He needs to know that the information superhighway runs both ways.

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OPINION

Castros not weakened by US policy change

By CHARLES LANE
The Washington Post

The U.S. embargo on Cuba — or what's left of it after President Barack Obama's dramatic Cuba policy announcement — may be a futile gesture. But it is, or was, not an empty gesture.

It put the United States firmly on record that it would have as little as possible to do with a regime whose misdeeds have included inviting Soviet nuclear weapons onto its soil, sponsoring violent guerrilla groups throughout the Western Hemisphere, harboring fugitives from U.S. justice and — last but certainly not least — systematically trampling its citizens' most basic rights.

In place of this clear position, Obama has taken a stance that is more nuanced morally but, he assures us, more efficacious practically.

He might be right, too — if you believe that this administration, or its successors, will be the diplomatic smarties, and the attention span, to maneuver the Castro regime into letting its people have more freedom.

Count me among the skeptics. As Obama's former Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner used to enjoy saying, "Plan beat no plan" — and Havana has more of a plan than Washington.

To be sure, President Raul Castro is in a world of trouble, what with his failing economy and the likelihood that declining oil prices will force Havana's Venezuelan sponsors to reduce their subsidies.

But this administration is a clear goal, keeping himself and Cuba's Communist elite in power, and a time-tested approach for doing so: permitting the minimum economic and political liberalization consistent with total control, and nothing more.

Greater engagement with the United States does pose risks to the regime, not the least of which is that incoming tourists and businessmen will start to erode a pervasive system of social and political control.

But Cuba's authorities have years of experience manipulating foreign investors from Latin America, Canada and Europe and with controlling Cubans' interactions with foreign visitors, who tend to be more interested in exploiting the local population than liberating it.

And on the plus side for Havana, Obama's measures, particularly greater remittances from U.S.-based Cubans, promise to bring much-needed hard currency to the perennially cash-strapped island.

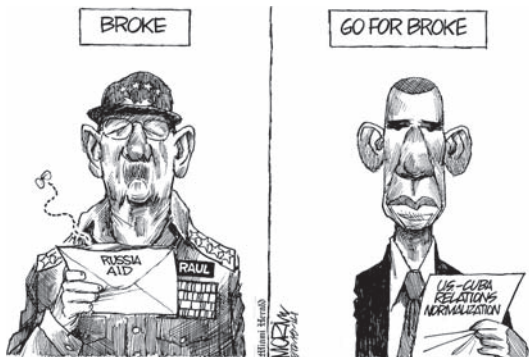
By contrast, Obama not only abandoned long-standing U.S. policy, he also denounced it, giving the regime a huge propaganda victory. "Long weeks of cheers and victory cries await us," dissident journalist Yoani Sanchez observed ruefully.

The president traded these valuables for the wrongly imprisoned American Alan Gross — but no verifiable, irreversible democratic reform on Cuba's part. To the contrary, Obama came dangerously close to endorsing the argument by Raul Castro and his brother, Fidel, that there's a binary choice between the status quo and chaos.

"It does not serve America's interests, or the interests of Cuba, to try to force a Cuba toward collapse," the president said. "Even if that worked — and it hasn't for 50 years — we know from hard-earned experience that countries are more likely to enjoy lasting transformation if their people are not subjected to chaos."

In doing so, the reforms he does support, the president was vague: In particular, he made no forthright demand for free elections, just freedom for Cubans to "participate in the political process," a right the Castros already claim to guarantee.

Instead, the president spoke more loose-



ly of "empowering Cubans to build an open and democratic country," with the help of greater remittances from their stateless relatives, more contact with U.S. travelers and businesses and so on.

Raul Castro can live with that. He knows that when the hoopla over this week's big policy move is over, when Obama has finished collecting kudos from foreign policy mavens who have been clamoring for a more "rational" U.S. Cuba policy, Obama and most of the rest of official Washington will move on to other things.

Meanwhile, Castro and his fellow military officers will remain in firm control of the political and economic levers of power in Cuba, including the little things — jobs, visas, building permits, export and import licenses, court cases — that really determine whether and how Cubans and Ameri-

cans get to interact and how much freedom seeps into the deeply traumatized society.

Castro can look forward to dealing with second-tier U.S. diplomats, torn between their belief in democracy and the bureaucratic imperative to keep their bosses' "engagement" project on track. When needed, a new Cuba lobby in Washington will help explain why it would be counterproductive to press Havana for immediate reform.

If this scenario sounds familiar, it's because it has already worked for China and Vietnam, with which the U.S. once made war but now does business. As Obama noted Wednesday, our policy toward Cuba is now more consistent with our policy toward those unfree states. For better or worse.

Charles Lane is a member of The Washington Post's editorial board.

Obama's gambling that he can defeat Cuba lobby

By NOAH FELDMAN
Bloomberg News

With his announcement that the United States will open negotiations and try to normalize relations with Cuba, President Barack Obama is trying to break the hold of the Cuba lobby on all.

In historical terms, that's a remarkable undertaking. For decades, U.S. policy toward Cuba has been guided by the smart, effective lobbying of a relatively small group of interested Cuban-Americans, mostly in Miami. The Cuba lobby's success has reflected a deep truth about American politics: Where there's a concentrated interest on one side of an issue, and only a diffuse interest on the other, the concentrated interest wins.

Will it work? If so, why now? And what are the implications for other concentrated lobbying groups, such as the National Rifle Association and the pro-Israel lobby, which have themselves succeeded by following a version of the approach that the Cuba lobby pioneered?

Begin with an incontrovertible fact: Obama's opening to Raul Castro's regime is precisely what the Cuba lobby has long feared and opposed. Its two leading voices in the Senate, New Jersey Democrat Robert Menendez and Florida Republican Marco Rubio, immediately condemned Obama's apparent swap of three convicted Cuban spies for convicted American Alan Gross and another unnamed American held on espionage charges in Cuba.

Rubio told The Associated Press that Obama was playing into Castro's hands, "providing the economic lift that the Castro regime needs to become permanent fixtures in Cuba for generations to come."

Since the end of the Cold War, independent foreign policy experts have argued that U.S. interests would be served by opening relations with Cuba. But Cuba's communism no longer needed to be contained or combated on a global scale, the reasoning runs, the U.S. would gain in trade with Cuba. Indeed, the infusion of capital and tourism into Cuba that would come with an end to U.S. sanctions would further weaken the socialism that still exists there. Yet despite the broad consensus in foreign policy circles, U.S. policy until now hasn't really changed — and the reason has been the effectiveness of the anti-Castro Cuba lobby.

The reason for the lobby's success has been the discipline with which it pursued its agenda. A handful of politicians receive extensive support from the lobby, and their views, unsurprisingly, correspond closely to the Cuban-Americans who support them. Other politicians may receive occasional support, but the lobby is not focused on them. The key to the operation is that the other side of the equation receives interest group at all advocating for the normalization of relations with Cuba.

Big agriculture corporations like Archer Daniels Midland would benefit from opening up trade but, even joined with other big ag actors, it's not realistic to defeat the concentrated interest of the Cuba lobby.

If this model of advocacy sounds famil-

iar, it should. The same basic structure explains the success of the National Rifle Association and the pro-Israel lobby exemplified by AIPAC. None of these organizations is breaking the rules. To the contrary, their success reflects the basic structure of U.S. politics. Those who support gun rights care deeply about the issue: They're the essence of a concentrated lobby. Those who would regulate guns are almost by definition more diffuse. They might be motivated after an event like the Newtown, Conn., shooting but, over time, diffuse interests return to their natural state of diffusion. The pro-Israel lobby succeeds not primarily because of its financial capacity or disproportionate cultural influence, but because there is no concentrated pro-Palestinian lobby of any real size in the U.S.

Why does Obama think he can beat the Cuba lobby now? The accidental political configuration of the moment provides the best explanation. His executive action on immigration reform has given the president — and probably the Democratic Party — a big boost among Latinos. He won't be running for re-election, and House Democrats will be vulnerable for another two years. As for Hillary Rodham Clinton, if she faces Jeb Bush in the 2016 presidential campaign, she will probably have to find a path to victory that doesn't involve winning Florida, Bush's home state. This all frees up Obama and the Democrats to take a crack at the Cuba lobby.

But the game won't be over with the opening of negotiations, which the president can do on his own. Restoring full dip-

lomatic relations and ending the embargo will require Congress' assent. Here the lobby can be expected to go into full concentrated opposition mode — and it has some chance of success.

What Obama must be hoping is that groups with a passing interest in the opening to Cuba will get on the bandwagon just long enough to counterbalance the power of the lobby and get the necessary legislation passed. Big ag will still have a diffuse interest — but perhaps the vision of money on the table in the near future will motivate sufficient support.

The risk that Obama carries in taking on a concentrated lobby isn't totally unfamiliar to him. After he tried to take on the NRA after the Newtown shootings. When he lost, the political cost to him was much less than the cost of doing nothing. With regard to Israel, Obama has tread much more carefully, limiting himself to the unmistakable message that he thinks West Bank settlements are an obstacle to peace and that Benjamin Netanyahu is, too. Many pro-Israel lobbying groups detest him for it, but they haven't yet had the occasion to go to war against him.

With the end of his presidency in view, Obama has to take risks if he wants to score some legacy points. His take on Cuba may not be fully realized. But the results will have implications for the structure of American interest group politics more broadly.

Noah Feldman, a Bloomberg View columnist, is an author and a professor of constitutional and international law at Harvard.

BUSINESS/WEATHER

Changing online prices stump shoppers

By ANNE D'INNOCENZO

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Online shopping has become as volatile as stock market trading. Wild, minute-by-minute price swings on everything from clothes to TVs have made it difficult for holiday shoppers to "buy low."

A growing number of retailers are using software that changes online prices based on demand, competition, inventory and other factors. The main goal is to undercut rivals when necessary, and to raise prices when demand is high and there's no competitive pressure.

But the new online tools can change the price on a single item — say, a sweater — dozens of times throughout the day. And that can leave shoppers confused about when they can get the best deal.

Take Aishia Shiner, who recently watched the price on a coat she wanted rise and fall several times between \$110 and \$139 in

a span of six hours on Amazon.com. She was so frustrated by the price fluctuations that she ended up not buying the coat on the site at all.

"It's definitely annoying," said Shiner, who lives in New Haven, Connecticut. "What exactly is making it go up and down?"

The rapidly changing prices come as retailers struggle to achieve conflicting goals this holiday season. They want to appease deal-hungry shoppers with the ever-lower prices they've come to expect since the recession. But they also want to protect their bottom line, which is difficult to do because lower prices cut into profits.

Retailers used to check prices of their rivals' websites and then manually changed the prices online. But that was a tedious task and many stores made price changes only once per day.

The idea of minute-by-minute monitoring of online prices started with Amazon.com, which for years has used its own software

to do so. Scott Stanzel, an Amazon spokesman, said: "We have a cost structure that allows us to adjust our pricing quickly."

After years of losing customers to Amazon because of its ability to offer deep discounts, Wal-Mart and others have started following the online retailer's lead. Eric Best, CEO of Mercent Corp., a software company that changes prices on 2 million products every hour, said the majority of his clients that include Office Depot, Guess and HSN Inc. make minute-by-minute pricing changes.

For instance, on a recent Monday, the price of Beats Studio headphones fluctuated between \$269.95 and \$199.95, with four price drops and five price increases, on Amazon.com.

Best said prices during this holiday season were more volatile than usual because retailers were focused on preserving margins during a period in which they can earn an average of about 30 percent of their annual profits. The result, he said, is that prices on a

dress can change several times in an hour. "All of this conspires to look like hotels and airline tickets," he said.

Wal-Mart Stores Inc. built its online price monitoring tool two years ago. And since overhauling its e-commerce business last summer, the world's largest retailer now can make price changes in a few minutes for what used to take up to 24 hours. "We have the ability to make thousands of changes on any given day," said Ravi Jarimala, a Wal-Mart spokesman.

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates	
Euro costs (Dec. 22)	\$1.2601
Dollar buys (Dec. 22)	€0.7936
British pound (Dec. 22)	\$1.61
Japanese yen (Dec. 22)	¥116.00
South Korean won (Dec. 22)	₩1,073.00

Commercial rates	
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3769
British pound	\$1.5648/0.6391
Canada (dollar)	1.1604
China (Yuan)	6.2198
Denmark (Krone)	6.9527
Egypt (Pound)	7.1501
Euro	\$1.2288/0.8138
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7543
Hungary (Forint)	257.60
Israel (Shekel)	3.9218
Japan (Yen)	119.28
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.2924
Norway (Krone)	7.2351
Philippines (Peso)	44.72
Poland (Zloty)	3.4748
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7541
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3162
South Korea (Won)	1,097.49
Switzerland (Franc)	0.9795
Taiwan (Dollar)	32.87
Turkey (Lira)	2.3152

(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For nonlocal currency exchange rates (i.e., the Netherlands and the United Kingdom), check with your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are interbank rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currencies to one dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)

INTEREST RATES

Prime rate	3.25
3-month bill	0.13
Federal funds market rate	0.13
3-month bill	0.04
30-year bond	2.82

MARKET WATCH

Dec. 18, 2014

Dow Jones Industrials	421.28
	17,778.15
Nasdaq composite	104.09
	4,748.40
Standard & Poor's 500	48.34
	2,061.23
Russell 2000	17.33
	1,192.16

WEATHER OUTLOOK



Saturday's US temperatures

City	Hi	Lo	Wthr	City	Hi	Lo	Wthr	City	Hi	Lo	Wthr	City	Hi	Lo	Wthr
Ablene, Tex	55	40	PCldy	Chatanooga	50	36	Cldy	Fort Wayne	34	26	Snow	Louisville	40	27	Cldy
Akron, Ohio	33	25	Cldy	Cheyenne	44	23	PCldy	Fresno	59	45	Cldy	Lubbock	53	34	Cldy
Albany, N.Y.	32	23	Cldy	Cincinnati	38	26	Cldy	Goodland	50	22	PCldy	Macon	55	42	Rain
Albuquerque	48	27	Cldy	Cleveland	34	27	Cldy	Grand Junction	38	26	Cldy	Medford	50	47	Rain
Allentown, Pa.	40	24	Cldy	Colorado Springs	47	24	PCldy	Great Falls	39	34	Cldy	Memphis	47	34	Cldy
Amarillo	54	39	PCldy	Columbia, S.C.	48	36	Rain	Green Bay	33	25	Cldy	Miami Beach	79	65	PCldy
Anchorage	29	21	Cldy	Columbus, Ga.	56	44	Rain	Greensboro, N.C.	40	31	Rain	Midland-Odessa	57	37	PCldy
Asheville	43	33	Snow	Columbus, Ohio	36	27	Cldy	Hartford	38	26	PCldy	Milwaukee	34	28	Cldy
Atlanta	50	41	Rain	Concord, N.H.	32	22	PCldy	Hartford Spring	36	28	Cldy	Norfolk	32	30	Cldy
Atlantic City	42	28	Cldy	Corpus Christi	59	50	Cldy	Helena	36	28	Cldy	Missoula	34	29	Cldy
Austin	51	41	Cldy	Dallas-Ft. Worth	52	41	Cldy	Honolulu	75	61	Cldy	Montgomery	58	45	Rain
Baltimore	42	30	Cldy	Dayton	37	26	Cldy	Houston	57	45	Cldy	Nashville	46	30	Cldy
Baton Rouge	59	47	Cldy	Daytona Beach	71	57	Cldy	Huntsville	51	37	Cldy	New Orleans	61	52	Cldy
Billings	49	37	PCldy	Denver	47	25	Cldy	Indianapolis	37	26	Cldy	New York City	40	32	Cldy
Birmingham	55	41	Cldy	Des Moines	38	33	Cldy	Jacksonville	58	43	Cldy	Newark	39	31	Cldy
Bismarck	33	17	Cldy	Detroit	34	27	Cldy	Janeau	63	53	Cldy	Norfolk Va.	43	34	Cldy
Boise	45	38	Rain	El Paso	56	34	PCldy	Kansas City	41	35	Cldy	North Platte	43	15	PCldy
Boston	35	32	Cldy	Elkins	36	26	Cldy	Key West	69	69	PCldy	Okla. City	50	38	Cldy
Bridgeport	55	55	Cldy	Erie	34	28	Cldy	Knoxville	48	34	Cldy	Omaha	39	30	Cldy
Buffalo	30	26	Cldy	Eugene	55	51	Rain	Lake Charles	57	45	Cldy	Orlando	75	57	Cldy
Burlington, Vt.	36	18	Cldy	Evansville	41	25	Cldy	Lansing	46	26	Cldy	Paduach	45	28	Cldy
Caribou, Maine	18	11	Cldy	Fairbanks	10	-8	Cldy	Las Vegas	59	44	Cldy	Pendleton	49	28	Cldy
Charleston, S.C.	52	43	Rain	Fargo	33	23	Cldy	Lexington	39	26	Cldy	Philadelphia	42	29	Cldy
Charleston, W.Va.	40	31	Cldy	Flagstaff	42	21	PCldy	Lincoln	40	27	Cldy	Phoenix	66	47	Cldy
Charlotte, N.C.	46	34	Rain	Fort Smith	51	35	Cldy	Little Rock	50	32	Cldy	Pittsburgh	34	26	Cldy

The weather is provided by the American Forces Network Weather Center, 2nd Weather Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb.

National temperature extremes

Hi: Thu., 80, Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and Brownsville, Texas	
Lo: Thu., -9, Grand Marais, Minn.	



'TIS THE SEASON.

To all who serve, our best wishes
this holiday season.

 **BOEING**

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Bullhook ban stops circus performances

CA OAKLAND — The circus will stop coming to Oakland in a few years after a tool used by elephant handlers was banned in the city.

The Oakland City Council earlier this week unanimously approved an ordinance outlawing bullhooks, an instrument resembling a fireplace poker with a sharp hook on one end that is used by trainers to control the animals.

Oakland is now the second city in California, after Los Angeles, to ban the use of a bullhook.

The ban will take effect in 2017, said Stephen Payne, a spokesman for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus.

The ordinance was supported by the Oakland Zoo and animal rights activists.

Payne said Ringling Bros. may work with the incoming City Council to reconsider the ban. The circus will stop performing in Los Angeles in the summer of 2016.

City says Uber drivers get same rules as cabs

NH PORTSMOUTH — The City of Portsmouth says that drivers for ride-sharing companies such as Uber meet the city's definition of taxi drivers and are subject to the same regulations.

The Portsmouth Herald reported that at a city meeting Wednesday night, cab drivers applauded the city's position. The city did not rule on whether to shut down an Uber driver currently operating in the city, as the cabbies had asked.

Uber and others like it use an app that allow riders to summon vehicles and to know exactly when the drivers will arrive. Cabbies say it puts them at a competitive disadvantage.

Ryan Fallon, an Uber driver in the city, said he's not like a cabbie because he only books fares through the app and can't take a cash payment.

Ex-nursing home worker sees charge dropped

OK OKLAHOMA CITY — Prosecutors are dropping a terrorism hoax charge against a former Oklahoma City nursing home employee who told his co-worker that he was going to cut off her head.

An Oklahoma County judge dismissed the felony charge Monday at the request of prosecutors.

District Attorney David Prater told The Oklahoman the charge was withdrawn because the credibility of the co-worker came into question. Other witnesses at the nursing home said the ex-employee was clearly joking.

The co-worker reported the incident to police on the same September day Islamic State militants released a video of the beheading of British aid worker David Haines.

An attorney for the ex-employee says his client and his family are proud the district attorney dismissed the charge.

THE CENSUS

34

The number of residential burglaries a Kansas City man is charged with committing while he was on parole for burglary. Roy E. Samuels, 64, was charged Wednesday with one count of first-degree burglary, 33 counts of second-degree burglary and 26 counts of theft. The burglaries occurred in Kansas City between July and September 2013. Prosecutors say he was linked to the crimes by a GPS device in an ankle bracelet he was wearing.



CURT HABRAKEN, THE (SEVIERVILLE, TENN.) MOUNTAIN PRESS/AP

Santa's little swashbucklers

Pirates and elves square off Tuesday during a production of "A Pirate Christmas" at Sevierville Intermediate School in Sevierville, Tenn.

Ex-officer arrested 3 times in 11 hours

CT BRIDGEPORT — A former police officer who appeared in court Monday on a drunken-driving charge was arrested three more times over the next 11 hours.

The Connecticut Post reported that John Biehn, 39, of Southington, was charged twice Monday with drunken driving and was accused of shoplifting at a Wal-Mart in Wallingford early Tuesday.

Police said Biehn, a former Bridgeport officer, posted bail after each arrest. Biehn's listed number rang unanswered Wednesday.

Authorities said Biehn appeared in Rockville Superior Court on Monday on a DUI charge dating from July 26.

He was arrested Monday afternoon in the parking lot of a Rockville McDonald's restaurant shortly after his court appearance and failed a sobriety check, police said.

He was stopped again and charged with DUI Monday night in Wallingford, a few hours be-

fore his arrest at the Wal-Mart on larceny charges.

Biehn left the Bridgeport police after being convicted of reckless endangerment in 2006. Prosecutors said Biehn went on a drunken rampage at a housing complex in 2004, firing his gun at random and shooting into several windows. Three residents testified that Biehn pointed the gun at their heads and tried to shoot them. Others said Biehn fired at them but missed.

He was acquitted of attempted murder and assault and received a suspended sentence.

Baby orangutan born at St. Louis Zoo

MO ST. LOUIS — The newest resident of the St. Louis Zoo is a baby orangutan.

Merah, a 45-year-old Sumatran orangutan, gave birth Sunday to a female. The zoo announced the birth on Thursday. Both the baby and the mother are doing well.

The father is Cinta, a 10-year-old who has been at the zoo since 2012, arriving from the San Diego

Zoo.

The baby is Merah's fifth. She is also a grandmother of two and a great-grandmother of one.

The mother and baby will bond in private for one or two months before the baby is displayed.

Rudolph statue thieves stir residents' ire

CA ROLLING HILLS ESTATES — Thieves have made off with a statue of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer that's been a holiday fixture in a Los Angeles-area neighborhood for half a century.

Residents of Rolling Hills Estates said the 200-pound wooden statue was taken sometime Friday night.

The culprits left Rudolph's broken antler behind.

Resident Tim Taylor, whose family has taken care of the handmade statue for several years, said he's hoping it's just a prank and that Rudolph will be returned.

KCBS-TV reported that missing posters have been distributed and the Los Angeles County

Sheriff's Department has taken a police report.

Officer asked to stop selling 'divisive' shirts

IN SOUTH BEND — Three South Bend city council members want a police officer to stop selling T-shirts that are a response to protests over a New York City man's choke hold death.

Members of the Notre Dame women's basketball team wore T-shirts prior to a weekend game reading "I can't breathe" that reference the last words of a black man who died during an arrest in New York City after a white police officer placed him in a choke hold.

Mishawaka Police officer Jason Barthel began selling T-shirts at a store he owns this week with the message "Breathe easy, don't break the law" in response to the Notre Dame protest.

The South Bend Tribune reported three Common Council members want Barthel to stop selling those shirts, saying they send a "divisive message."

From wire reports

LIFESTYLE

Tradition trumps kitsch

More buyers choose German wooden crafts over modern holiday bling

BY LEON MANGASARIAN
AND ALESSANDRO SPECIALE
Bloomberg News

The makers of Germany's traditional wooden holiday decorations have stuck with the tried and true, ignoring bling, singing Santas and dancing reindeer in their handmade artisanship.

That strategy is paying off as the more than 300-year-old craft unique to the Ore Mountains in eastern Germany—a picturesque area dotted with castles and fortresses that forms a natural border between the country and the Czech Republic—has never been more in demand. The artisanship is a staple of Christmas markets and sold around the world.

Kept alive during communism as a source of hard currency, sales of Erzgebirge Christmas tree ornaments, nutcrackers and candle-lit holiday pyramids have doubled since reunification in 1990 to about 50 million euros (\$62 million) a year. The thriving industry, which dates to the 17th century, directly employs about 2,000 people and stands in contrast to other traditional crafts, such as Venice's Murano glass, struggling for survival as cheap knockoffs draw away customers.

"Handcrafted Christmas decorations are a way to hit the brakes in our fast-paced lives," Dieter Uhlmann, head of the Association of Erzgebirge Artisans and Toy Manufacturers, said of the appeal of the region's goods.

Buyers are drawn to the artisanship using methods going back centuries. Wendt & Kuehn, founded in 1915 in the village of Gruenhainichen, Germany, follows 40 steps to make the company's signature wooden angels with wings or smaller angels holding musical instruments or toys.

The manufacturer, which has survived two world wars, hyperinflation and a state takeover under the communists, returned to family ownership in 1990. The entire assembly process is still done in-house, with Christmas figures cut, fit together and painted by hand based on 2,500 designs from the company's founders.

The spruce, beech and linden come from the nearby forests in a landscape that transforms into a snow-covered wonderland in winter. In tune with its old-fashioned approach, Wendt & Kuehn, which has increased sales 4 percent annually for

the past three years to about 8.5 million euros, offers a rare service for a Christmas decoration maker: Its own repair department can fix angels that are broken or singed by candles.

Chief Executive Officer Claudia Baer, the third generation of the family to run Wendt & Kuehn, compares what her company does to the push that started in the 1980s in Italy to promote local foods and centuries-old gastronomic traditions.

"We're a counter-movement, just like Slow Food," Baer said at the company's 19th century half-

'Where in the world can you find a business with products that have been available for about 350 years that are still produced in the same way?'

Ringo Mueller
Fourth-generation woodcarver, Seiffen, Germany

and even Asia—has led to counterfeits being produced abroad by machine and passed off as handmade.

"We've won numerous court cases against people who do this," the association chief said.

The Ore Mountains have been a center for mining dating to the 14th century. Wooden toy-making began in the 17th century as a way to earn extra money and was expanded in the

timbered factory.

"Smart phones are out of date in a flash, but we'll be producing the same things in 10 years."

The region also has been vigilant in protecting its craft. Uhlmann said the success of the decorations—popular in the United States, Germany



Photos courtesy of ruemmlerfotografie

Workers use lathes to carve wood for traditional Christmas ornaments in the workshop of Wendt & Kuehn Gruenhainichen, Germany.

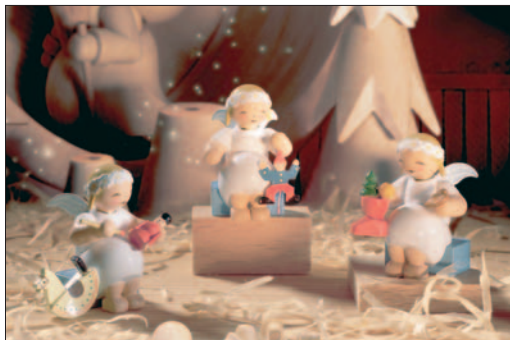
19th century as mining began to decline.

The family company founded by Ringo Mueller's great grandfather in 1899 originally produced small wooden toys, such as cars and model furniture. Mueller, in the heart of the region in the village of Seiffen, avoided nationalization during communist rule by focusing on traditional Christmas decorations, sold chiefly in the West, to gain hard currency.

"Where in the world can you find a business with products that have been available for about 350 years that are still produced in the same way?" Mueller asked. "It is a tradition that is worth working for."

Today, the Erzgebirge also draws travelers from as far away as Japan looking for ornaments, and many of the castles have been converted into hotels. On a recent Sunday, the streets in Seiffen were teeming with tourists shopping for decorations.

Among the visitors were Niels



Kiessling and Susi Weissbach, both 25, who came with their one-month-old daughter to buy a wooden pyramid. The ornaments, which have a propeller on top that spins the table-top decoration with the heat of candles on the base, are as common in Germany as stockings in the United States.

"It's important to have a pyramid in our new house," said Weissbach, a resident of the eastern German city of Zwickau. "Our parents had it and we want it, too."

One nod to modernity is the use

of the Internet, which the Erzgebirge producers have successfully embraced to widen their customer base. The online price starts in the U.S. for Wendt & Kuehn's wooden angel figurines at about \$25. For everything else, tradition remains key.

"We love these decorations because we knew them as children and they bring back wonderful memories," said Jacqueline Lorenz as she painted wooden birds at the Werkstatt Leichenring in Seiffen. "That's why people keep buying them."



A worker hand paints a traditional wooden angel Christmas ornament in the Wendt & Kuehn workshop. The company's artisans follow 40 steps to make its signature angels, such as those on display at right.

VIDEO GAMES

'Little BIG Planet 3'

Fun game weaves creativity, sharing and platforming in one awesome title



By MICHAEL S. DARNELL
Stars and Stripes

We are well into the holiday gaming season, that glorious time of year where every publisher on the face of the planet has pushed out a game to try to cash in on your Christmas cheer.

While it's not exactly accurate to call perennial platformer "LittleBigPlanet" an unknown quantity, its third and most recent installment is in danger of being overlooked by the Christmas shopping crowd.

It can be confusing out there for non-gamers looking to fill the stockings of their electronically minded loved ones, so let me help. If you have an owner of a PlayStation 4 on your shopping list, "LittleBigPlanet 3" is probably the perfect gift.

I say "probably" only to hedge my bets against those people who are just averse to fun, sunshine and happiness. Everybody else should be able to glean at least some enjoyment out of "LittleBigPlanet 3."

Don't believe me? Let's talk about the types of gamers that will love this game. There are the single-player fans, who just want a game to sit down and relax with after a long day. "LittleBigPlanet 3" delivers exactly that with a tremendous single-player campaign that finally fixes some of the issues with the previous games. In the other installments, the single-player modes were dull affairs that served more or less only as

a gateway to the creative mode.

While users will still have to play through the single-player mode to unlock the widdits, stickers and doodads that make creative mode so expansive, the base game is actually fun.

This time around, the game borrows some elements from the "Metroidvania" style of games.

Certain areas won't be immediately accessible until you unlock a certain power-up or character. Some elements of this were present in the past, but here it's used to much greater effect. When you know you might have to come back to a level, you tend to enjoy playing it more than just wondering how the heck you can grab that one power-up.

Oh, and the much-maligned floaty jump physics of the past games has been reduced significantly. It's still not quite as tight as any of the "Mario" games, but the cheap feel of the past is gone. In past "LittleBigPlanet" titles, I played the single-player mode only for as long as it took to nab enough prizes to be able to re-create my artistic vision in creative mode. Now, I genuinely look forward to playing through the entire campaign.

Players can bring a friend to run through the campaign with, or they can just connect to a random player over the network. In fact, some of the puzzles in the campaign require two players to complete, so multiplayer aficionados might especially enjoy this game. I tested the online components extensively, and the netcode seems rock solid. I never once had a drop or lag issue and the online community is enormous, so there was never a long wait for a partner.

That leads us to what has always been the

real strength of "LittleBigPlanet" — the community and creative modes. For those unfamiliar with the series, "LittleBigPlanet" revolves around a creative mode that gives players nearly unlimited tools to build and design not only their own levels, but entire games within the game. "LittleBigPlanet 3" offers an astounding array of tools for budding game designers to play around with. If it can be imagined, it probably can be created here. Once you're finished creating your own level or racing game or role-playing action adventure, you can upload it to the PlayStation Network and share it with the world.

The community that has evolved around this feature is astoundingly large. There are hundreds of custom games players can join, offering up nearly an infinite amount of entertainment, even once the campaign is long completed. Even if you never touch the creative mode personally, you can spend hours just seeing how people have used the "LittleBigPlanet" toolset to create some truly impressive stuff.

Finally, this is one of the rare games I can honestly recommend

Overall grade: **A+**

for gamers of all ages.

The art style and narration is mostly geared toward a younger audience, but there is plenty of challenge in the creative modes for adults to enjoy too. Between the excellent campaign and the increasingly complex creative mode, there is enough content here to easily justify a purchase, either for yourself or for that special gamer in your life.

Bottom line: "LittleBigPlanet 3" is easily among the best games of the year.

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Grade: A+

Platform: PlayStation 4 (cross-platform

play on PS Vita)

Rating: E for Everyone

Online: littlebigplanet.playsta

tion.com



"LittleBigPlanet 3" continues with the same wacky art style of its predecessors, with levels that riff on haunted houses, Hollywood and outer space.



Photos courtesy of Sony

MOVIES

Jackson leaves Middle-earth with 'The Hobbit'

By JILL LAWLESS
The Associated Press

After a long and eventful journey, "The Hobbit" trilogy has reached its middle climax.

Not a minute too soon for director Peter Jackson, who has been longing to unleash mayhem on Middle-earth.

"It's the first time we've got to kill dwarves," said the director, his enthusiasm for death and destruction at odds with his laid-back manner and luxurious surroundings in a London hotel suite.

"It's hard to get any emotional power in a film unless you are able to actually kill some of your main characters," he said. "We've been hampered with that in the first two 'Hobbit' movies. But at least we have a good dwarf death toll in the third one."

"The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies" wraps up a trilogy spun from J.R.R. Tolkien's slim book about home-loving hobbit Bilbo Baggins, coaxed away from his burrow to help a band of dwarves retake their mountain home from a destructive dragon.

The third film sees the dragon dispatched before a cataclysmic clash involving armies of dwarves, elves, humans, eagles and dastardly orcs.

It's a CGI extravaganza, with

all the visual overkill that 3-D and 48-frames-per-second filming can provide.

But Jackson says this film was the most emotionally satisfying of the three. (It's also the shortest, at a bloody brisk 144 minutes.) For one thing, while the first two movies charted a journey, this one largely stays put, at the Lonely Mountain of Erebor.

"It was a joy not to have to do any big helicopter shots of people walking across New Zealand landscapes," Jackson said — although the country's tourist authorities might disagree. Tolkien tourism has become a big draw for the small nation.

"The thing that I like about this one, probably more than anything — even more than killing dwarves — is that it's got this feeling of a thriller about it," Jackson said. "I enjoyed being able to be sharper and crank the tension up and up and up and up until the battle breaks out."

His enthusiasm is shared by Martin Freeman, who plays reluctant hero Bilbo. The film brings a peril-strewn emotional climax to the hobbit's complicated friendship with dwarf leader Thorin Oakenshield (Richard Armitage).

"I always like dark tones anyway," said Freeman, who recently took a break from playing



JOEL RYAN, INVISION/AP

Actor Martin Freeman, left, and director Peter Jackson reunite for "The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies," the third in a trilogy of films adapted from J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy novel "The Hobbit."

dependable Dr. Watson in "Sherlock" to star as morally compromised insurance salesman Lester Nygaard in the TV series "Fargo."

"I like playing light and I like playing comedy, but my natural inclination is very often not toward that. ... I like stretching out. I kind of feel very fulfilled when acting not happy."

"Battle of the Five Armies" completes a Tolkien saga that includes Jackson's three "Lord of the Rings" films.

The director says the darkening mood of the "Hobbit" films was a deliberate attempt to segue into the more grown-up world of "The Lord of the Rings," set decades later.

"Ultimately these movies will be judged in decades to come as a six-film series that will start with

the first 'Hobbit' film and finish with (final 'Rings' movie) 'The Return of the King,'" Jackson said.

"If we'd made 'The Hobbit' first we'd probably have made it much more like a young children's story, which is how the book's written." Jackson has spent a decade and a half in Middle-earth, and says "I certainly feels like it's time to move on to other things." He has one more bit of "Hobbit" business to complete, an extended cut of the new movie with about half an hour of extra material.

A lot has changed since he embarked on his journey.

The digital technology the films rely on has become ever more sophisticated.

"When we did the first 'Lord of the Rings' movie we couldn't do CGI water and fire," Jackson

said. He can now — "The Battle of the Five Armies" opens with a spectacular dragon attack on Lake-town.

And the image of the fantasy genre has been transformed. Jackson could not have imagined when he started that a show like "Game of Thrones" would receive serious cultural kudos.

"I always used to get very annoyed, because if you were a filmmaker making a fantasy film, it was like a license to be a little bit silly, a little bit lightweight and comical," Jackson said. "It was almost like you couldn't treat it with any degree of seriousness."

If his films have done anything, Jackson said, "I hope it's let people know that you don't have to treat fantasy that way. You can give it the respect that it deserves."

Cast of characters for 'The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies'

The Fresno Bee

Any film that calls itself "The Battle of Five Armies" lets you know that there are going to be a lot of characters. It's been a year since the last adventures of Bilbo Baggins and the rest of the cast of characters. Here's a quick reminder of some of the major players.

Afrim (Ryan Gage): Chief henchman to the Master of Lake-town.

Azog (Manu Bennett): Orc leader who pursues Thorin and the Company of Dwarves.

Bain (John Bell): Son of Bard the Bowman.

Balin (Ken Stott): Dwarf leader who joins the Company of Dwarves.

Bard the Bowman (Luke Evans): Enlists every man in Dale to take up weapons against the Orc horde tearing through the city.

Bifur (William Kircher): Part of the Company of Dwarves.

Bilbo Baggins (Martin Freeman): Hobbit, who has traveled with the company of Dwarves because of his thievery skills, now looks to help broker peace.

Bofur (James Nesbitt): A member of the Company of Dwarves group.

Bolg (John Tu): Orc warlord who's the son of Azog.

Bombur (Stephen Hunter): One of the Company of Dwarves.

Dain (Billy Connolly): Ironfoot and his Dwarven army collide with the Elven forces.

Dori (Mark Hadlow): Flute-playing part of the Company of Dwarves.

Dwalin (Graham McTavish): Company of Dwarves member who was a Dwarf of the House of Durin.

Elrond (Hugo Weaving): Mighty

Elven king who's the Lord of Rivendell.

Fili (Dean Cain): One of the youngest members of the Company of Dwarves.

Gandalf (Cate Blanchett): Gandalf's ageless friend and powerful ally in the White Council.

Gandalf the Grey (Ian McKellen): After managing to escape near death, Gandalf hopes to rally the armies of Elves, Dwarves and Men to stand together.

Gloin (Peter Hambleton): One of the Company of Dwarves.

Kili (Aidan Turner): Member of the Company of Dwarves who has feelings for Tauriel.

Legolas (Orlando Bloom): Thranduil's only son. The Elf is a master archer.

Nori (Jed Brophy): Part of the Company of Dwarves.

Oin (John Callen): Company of Dwarves members.

Ori (Adam Brown): One of the loyal Companions of Dwarves.

Radagast (Sylvester McCoy): Wizard who helps Gandalf.

Saruman (Christopher Lee): Powerful wizard who goes on a darker journey in the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy.

Smaug (Benedict Cumberbatch): Fire-breathing dragon that attacks Lake-town.

Tauriel (Evangeline Lilly): Captain of his Guard banished for the rebellious act of helping the Company of Dwarves.

Thorin Oakenshield (Richard Armitage): He is ready to sacrifice friendship and honor in his search for the legendary Arkenstone.

Thranduil (Lee Pace): Leader of the Elves who in Erebor finds himself in a face-to-face with a very changed Thorin.



Gage



Evans



Freeman



Bloom



Armitage



Lilly



Pace

HEALTH & FITNESS

Vaccine problems could signal rocky flu season

By JONEL ALLECIA
The Seattle Times

Nancy Dragun wanted to ward off flu this year, so she got her family vaccinated early, a shot for herself and doses of the FluMist nasal spray for her two boys, ages 9 and 11.

"I trust the experts, I guess, and my pediatricians have always recommended it," said Dragun, 42, who works at the University of Washington.

But Dragun said she's disturbed at new evidence showing this year's vaccine — both the FluMist spray and the seasonal shots — likely won't protect very well against targeted flu viruses. In the case of FluMist, there are problems with effectiveness in two of the three or four flu strains it's formulated to hit.

"I'm starting to wonder if I should have done that," Dragun said. "It's a little bit nerve-wracking, for sure."

At the start of what could be a bad flu season, health officials are scrambling to reassure the public that even though this year's vaccine has problems, it's still the best way to prevent potentially deadly flu infections.

"The flu is a very wily and cagey virus," said Dr. Don Shifrin, a Bellevue, Wash., pediatrician. "Every year we try to play whack-a-mole with the flu virus. Some years we do better than others, but we're still in the game."

A report released in November by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that FluMist offered "no measurable effectiveness" against one virus, the H1N1 swine flu, among children last year. Because the vaccine hasn't changed, the same results might occur this year, health officials said.

Then CDC officials recently announced that the 2014-15 vaccine is a poor match for about half of the H3N2 viruses that appear



ELLEN M. BANNER, THE SEATTLE TIMES/TNS

Despite flu-vaccine problems, experts say vaccines offer important defense against flu.

to be the dominant strain already spreading this season.

"Flu is unpredictable, but what we've seen thus far is concerning," CDC Director Dr. Tom Frieden told news reporters.

This could be a worse-than-normal year for flu, Frieden added, because seasons in which H3 viruses dominate typically cause more illnesses and deaths than seasons in which H1 viruses are common.

CDC officials also warned doctors about the problem, urging them — and consumers — to seek antiviral drugs such as Tamiflu and Relenza at the first sign of flu, especially for people particularly vulnerable to infection.

The antiviral drugs don't stop flu, but

they might shorten the intensity and duration of the illness, experts said.

The flu-vaccine problems are bad news for health officials, who recommend that everyone older than 6 months get shots or sprays. Only about 42 percent of adults and less than 60 percent of kids and teens got inoculated for flu last year, according to the CDC.

In a good year, flu vaccine is about 50 to 70 percent effective at preventing illness, experts estimate. In a bad year, more of those inoculated get sick anyway. In 2007-08, when there was a mismatch between vaccine and virus, efficacy dropped to just above 40 percent. Shifrin said he worries that might prompt some people to skip the

shots this year — and in the future.

"It's very easy to scare people," he said. "We don't want to put out the message that the flu vaccine doesn't work."

The flu season has just started, health records show.

About 94 percent of more than 13,000 samples tested so far by the CDC are the dominant H3N2 subtype of flu, about 6 percent are the B strain, and almost none were the H1N1 swine flu, which descended from the 2009 pandemic strain, according to new flu figures released last week.

But more than half of the H3 subtypes are a new H3 strain that has "drifted," or changed from the type targeted by this year's flu vaccine. As a result, the vaccine likely offers poor protection against that strain, Frieden said.

That subtype first showed up in March overseas, but it wasn't seen in large numbers in the U.S. until September. Because it takes about four months to manufacture a flu vaccine, it's too late to make a change, Frieden added. So far this year, about 150 million doses of flu vaccine have been released.

The problem with FluMist is different. Scientists still don't know why the vaccine failed almost completely to protect against the H1N1 swine-flu strain last year, particularly in the youngest patients.

"This was very surprising," said Mike Jackson, a scientific investigator at Group Health Research Institute in Seattle, one of five sites across the country that routinely conduct vaccine-effectiveness checks for the CDC. "It's really quite different from the way this specific vaccine performed in the last couple years."

News about problems with the vaccines is surprising and concerning for parents like Dragun.

"As a mother, my first priority is to protect my kids, but I don't want to put anything additional into them if it's not going to protect them," she said.

App helps keep at-risk dieters on track

By ERYN BROWN
Los Angeles Times

Qiana Sago knew she had a problem.

Three years ago, at age 30, she weighed 269 pounds. She was taking pills for high blood pressure. Her triglycerides were "the highest you can have," she said.

Working as an LAX airport custodian, she was surrounded by fast food, which became a daily staple. "You ate (it) when you got to work, you ate it again midday," she said. "Then I'd get off work and eat more."

But, partly because she was provided access to unique fitness technology, the Inglewood, Calif., resident has turned things around — losing more than 40 pounds and working toward the day she can stop taking blood pressure medication.

Sago and 39 other young African-American women at Faithful Central Bible Church recently participated in a clinical trial that used a smartphone app to track their eating and activity and teach them healthful diet and exercise habits.

Many such mobile health, or "m-health," programs are in their infancy. But researchers

and advocates for underserved, hard-to-reach patient groups hope they soon will contribute to major advances in the treatment of diabetes, heart disease and other chronic conditions.

Cellphones provide unprecedented, low-cost access to patients, experts say, because the technology is so widely used and the socioeconomic digital divide is shrinking. The Pew Research Internet Project reported earlier this year that 84 percent of U.S. adults with incomes below \$30,000 a year had cellphones; 47 percent had smartphones.

Increasingly, phones — not home-based broadband connections — are the gateway to the Internet for all Americans.

"Anything that you're doing online, that you want to extend to a low-income population, the way they're most likely to access it is through mobile," said Margaret Laws of the California Health Care Foundation in Oakland.

Vickie Mays, a researcher and psychologist at UCLA, collaborates with the school's Wireless Health Institute, which backed the Inglewood study. Mobile technology offers a powerful tool to assist people seeking to change bad eating and lifestyle habits, she said, because it can reinforce

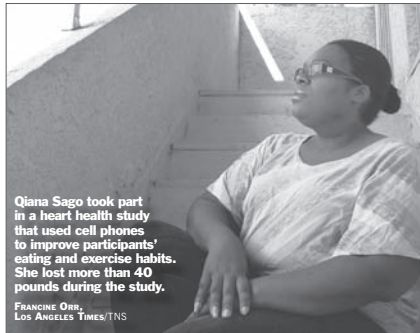
medical advice after a patient leaves the doctor's office.

Heart disease among young black women — a long-recognized problem — appeared to be an ideal condition to target with m-health programs, said Jo-Ann Eastwood, a nurse practitioner and associate professor at UCLA's School of Nursing who ran the church group study.

"I was tired of seeing women come in at 55 years old and they've already had a heart attack," she said. "Their illness hadn't been picked up early enough. That's what drew me to this population: Where could I do the most good?"

Sago and the other women selected for the study all were between 25 and 45 and had at least two risk factors for heart disease. They knew that they needed to eat well and exercise. But many said they were too busy caring for their children and parents — and working long hours — to find time to care for themselves. They also needed help understanding nutrition labels.

Eastwood taught the women about heart-healthy lifestyles and stress reduction in four diet-and-exercise classes before handing out custom-configured Android phones.



Qiana Sago took part in a heart health study that used cell phones to improve participants' eating and exercise habits. She lost more than 40 pounds during the study.

FRANCINE ORR,
LOS ANGELES TIMES/TNS

The devices were disabled for voice calls but could be used to text others in the study group. The phones were loaded with an app, developed at UCLA, that interacted with the women, sending daily and weekly questions. "Did you eat five to six servings of fruit today?" — and tracking how much exercise they got via built-in accelerometers.

Study participants were supposed to wear the smartphones whenever they were awake. They also had to measure their blood pressure on Sunday nights, using

Bluetooth-equipped blood-pressure cuffs that sent readings to the phones, which then streamed the data to the researchers.

Preliminary results from the study have been promising. Compared with a control group, the church women had significant improvements in blood pressure and cholesterol levels, lower levels of anxiety and stress and improved eating and exercise habits. The UCLA team reported their findings last month at an American Heart Association scientific meeting in Chicago.

LIFESTYLE

'It's all hands on deck'



By GAVIN STERN
Scripps News

Don't let your kids read this — but Santa doesn't wear red.

This holiday season is expected to be the biggest in the history of package delivery, thanks to an increase in holiday shopping and an improved economy. UPS, FedEx and the U.S. Postal Service each expect about a 10 percent increase in volume this holiday.

To meet that demand, they've hired more than 150,000 temporary employees to deliver more than a billion holiday packages. After all, 9 out of 10 Americans celebrate Christmas in one form or another.

But that's not the whole story.

Christmas comes early

In the early-morning light, after coffee and doughnut (a treat for meeting performance goals), UPS drivers of the 200-truck Sharonville, Ohio, hub arrange in a semicircle. They do a communal stretch and go over the day's safety lesson.

Veteran driver Greg Schneider, 53, holds up a plastic tricycle and a sign that reads, "back up only when necessary." Backing up the trucks less means fewer accidents. With thousands of trucks on the road na-

tionally, driving millions of hours, that adds up.

The next day's lesson — driver health. In the rush to deliver, it's important to remember the little things.

"It's all hands on deck. Everyone just needs to do their job the way we were trained, do it safely and then we'll be able to take care of our customer's needs," Schneider said. "It's not easy to do, but we're trained professionals."

This is Schneider's 36th Christmas with UPS. His hands are one of the thousands that touch the holiday gifts of grandkids, cousins and in-laws.

"We handle a lot of packages this time of year, but UPS has hired enough people. We purchase more vehicles. We've built more hubs. We've updated more facilities," Schneider said.

One thing that's changed in 36 years is that the trucks are fitted with Orion, a computer system that determines the most efficient route for each driver to take.

The technology allows UPS to save gas, increase delivery stops per truck and overall make better use of the resources it already has. They'll need that capacity to avoid a delivery driver catastrophe: having to make last-minute deliveries on Christmas day.

Waiting until the last minute for the holiday orders is still not a great idea, though.

"But even if you do, we'll do our best to get the packages there," Schneider said.

The 200 engines start and trucks taxi out of the hangar like jets at the airport. Within minutes, the hub is silent and cold.

The never-ending conveyor belt

Handhelds beep, boxes thump and somewhere a truck radio is blasting "November Rain."

At a FedEx Express local distribution center in Cincinnati, handlers and drivers get to work after their own pep talk. Their uniforms and trucks are a lighter shade and the doughnuts are a little heavier on the glaze. Yet the mission is the same — deliver.

That's far from the first step.

Planning for the holidays begins up to eight months in advance. Right around Easter, FedEx works with customers — in this case, the online retailers — to figure out their needs.

"It's tough to mentally prepare because there are a lot of people who are going to work a lot of hours. They don't see their families too much," said Jeffrey Bronner, FedEx Operations manager. "It's pretty rough from Thanksgiving on to Christmas."



PHOTOS BY GAVIN STERN, SCRIPPS NATIONAL DESK/TNS

At top: A FedEx facility near Cincinnati, Ohio, is the hub of busy days and nights during holiday shipping season. This year is the busiest ever. Above: UPS driver Greg Schneider, 53, of Ohio, has been with the package delivery service for decades and says the holiday season is a driver's chance to shine. "It's all hands on deck. Everyone just needs to do their job the way we were trained, do it safely and then we'll be able to take care of our customer's needs," Schneider said. "It's not easy to do, but we're trained professionals."

By 7 a.m., tractor-trailers start to arrive from hubs in Indianapolis and Memphis. This is the morning sort, a 90-minute ritual undertaken before most people are turning on their morning shower. Some of those customers will have their package by breakfast.

The packages come off the trailers in heavy metal containers, each about the size of an SUV. They glide on a floor that's lined with slippery wheels, which stops at a conveyor belt that seems to never end.

The employees have about an hour to unload the trailers, sort the packages and get them onto their delivery trucks, which are backed up to the belt like leaves growing on a branch. That's all before they go out to make their deliveries.

Each package is scanned (up to 20 times a day), sorted and put on a truck. A bay is pulled aside to get patched up. Documents go in bins. Just as the belt starts to clear, another tractor-trailer backs in.

More crates, more boxes — oh, there goes a set of snow tires!

On an average day, FedEx will handle a little more than 10 million of these packages. That will more than double on their "peak days" in mid-December.

It's a "crazy" but "special" time of year, said Ben Noschang, a young delivery driver now in his 10th year at FedEx.

"It's a little like being Santa Claus," Noschang said. "It gives you pride in your job when you know it's something a child will open on Christmas morning."

What happens inside a package delivery facility during the holidays

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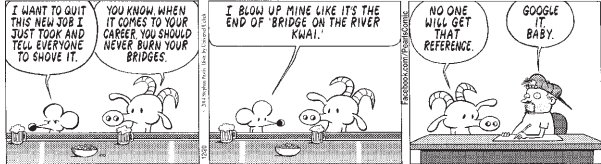
Frazz



Dilbert



Pearls Before Swine



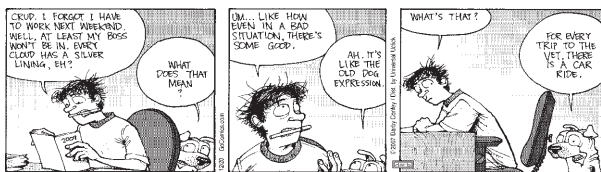
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Candorville



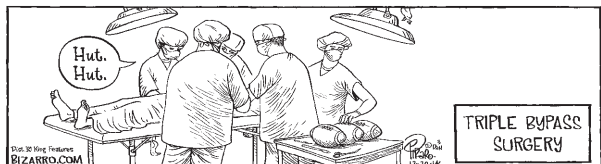
Get Fuzzy



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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ACROSS

- 1 "Dancing With the Stars" network
- 4 Lions' pride :: — : parliament
- 8 Zinger
- 12 Writer Buscaglia
- 13 Source
- 14 Mississippi tributary
- 15 Standard
- 16 TV chef Cat
- 17 "Wow!"
- 18 Supreme Court justice
- 21 Melody
- 22 Troubadour's song
- 23 Duel tool
- 26 Plead
- 27 "Mayday!"
- 30 Remark from 27-Down
- 31 Clear the tables
- 32 Filly's brother
- 33 Conk out
- 34 Lustrous black
- 35 Boisterous
- 36 State of matter
- 37 Lubricant
- 38 Supreme Court justice
- 45 Poi base
- 46 Social appointment
- 47 A billion years
- 48 Newspaper pg.
- 49 Eastern bigwig
- 50 Shock partner
- 51 "The Say Hey Kid"
- 52 Red and Black
- 53 Manhandle
- lawn
- 24 Nintendo console
- 25 Inseparable
- 26 Nevertheless
- 27 Boar's mate
- 28 Antiquated
- 29 Farm structure
- 31 Furthermore
- 32 Pop flavor
- 34 One of the Brady bunch
- 35 Kitchen gizmos
- 36 Merchandise
- 37 Tiber port
- 38 Teeny bit
- 39 California wine valley
- 40 Deuce topper
- 41 Driver's license datum
- 42 Bound
- 43 Waterloo's home
- 44 Freshly

DOWN

- 1 European range
- 2 Defeat
- 3 Heart
- 4 Corsage bloom
- 5 Hand seker?
- 6 Forsaken, poetically
- 7 Belmont areas
- 8 Birdie's opposite
- 9 "Hi, sailor"
- 10 Stand
- 11 Physicist Niels
- 19 Take a space
- 20 Tatter
- 23 Lay down the

Answer to Previous Puzzle

B	R	A	P	U	B	T	R	A	D	E
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12-20

CRYPTOQUIP

JRG UWBAEWBJN TBGX DGA
FENKO RXMG X FEKO EA SKN.

RG'T O GKUMGAUVP KEJT ES
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Yesterday's Cryptoquip: SOUTHERN LAW-
ENFORCEMENT AGENTS WHO ARE EXCELLENT
AT ORCHESTRATING MUSIC: THE TEXAS
ARRANGERS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: S equals F

MLB/SPORTS BRIEFS

'Hot Stove' roundup

Padres set to acquire OF Upton from Braves

By PAUL NEWBERRY
The Associated Press

ATLANTA — Landing another of baseball's top power hitters, the San Diego Padres agreed to a trade for Atlanta Braves outfielder Justin Upton, a person with knowledge of the deal told The Associated Press on Friday.

The person, speaking on condition of anonymity because the teams had not announced the deal, said the Braves would receive a group of prospects. Among the players discussed were left-hander Max Fried, shortstop Jace Peterson and third baseman Dustin Peterson.

The Padres already made two huge trades in recent days, acquiring slugger Matt Kemp from the Los Angeles Dodgers and former AL Rookie of the Year Wil Myers from the Tampa Bay Rays.

Now, San Diego has picked up one of baseball's top right-handed power threats in Upton, who will earn \$14.5 million in the final year of his contract. He had 29 homers and 102 RBIs last season.

In all likelihood, the Padres are not done dealing yet, with a glut of outfielders on the roster.

In contrast to San Diego's win-now approach, the Braves are in rebuilding mode after failing to make the playoffs last season and are aiming toward the opening of their new suburban stadium in 2017. New general manager John Hart has dealt two of the top hitters from a lineup that already had trouble scoring runs, trading Jason Heyward to the Cardinals.

Upton and Heyward are heading into the final year of their contracts, and the Braves were not willing to risk losing them while getting nothing in return.

With a solid pitching staff in place, the Padres have taken huge steps to pump up the major leagues' worst offense under their new general manager, A.J. Preller.

The trade for Upton came less than 24 hours after the Padres finalized a five-player trade with the Dodgers. The biggest name in that deal was Kemp, a four-time All-Star whose 182 homers ranked ninth in



AL BEHRMAN/AP

A person with knowledge of the deal says the San Diego Padres have agreed to acquire slugger Justin Upton from the Atlanta Braves. The person, speaking on condition of anonymity Friday because the teams had not announced the deal, said the Braves will receive a group of prospects.

Los Angeles Dodgers history.

San Diego also was completing an 11-player, three-team trade that will bring Myers from the Rays. He would likely play center field, flanked by Upton and Kemp, to suddenly give the Padres one of the most dynamic outfielders in the major leagues.

In addition, they still have their three outfielders who got the bulk of the playing time in 2014: Seth Smith, Cameron Maybin and Will Venable. The best option for a deal would appear to be Smith, who hit .266 with 12 homers and 48 RBIs.

Also:
■ Two people with knowledge of the deal say the Oakland Athletics have traded All-Star catcher Derek Norris and minor

league right-hander Seth Streich to the San Diego Padres for righties Jesse Hahn and R.J. Alvarez along with an international signing bonus slot.

The people spoke on condition of anonymity Thursday night because neither team had announced the agreement. Both clubs have been busy in the trade market this offseason, and this week.

Norris, 25, batted .270 with 10 home runs and 55 RBIs in 127 games for the A's, who lost the wild-card game at Kansas City.

■ The Phillies have finalized their trade of Jimmy Rollins, sending the All-Star shortstop and cash to the Los Angeles Dodgers for right-hander Zach Eflin and left-hander Tom Windle.

The deal was agreed to last week at the winter meetings and announced Friday, a day after the Dodgers completed a trade that sent outfielder Kemp to San Diego.

Rollins, a three-time All-Star, hit .243 last season with 11 homers, 55 RBIs and 28 steals. The 26-year-old had started 14 consecutive openers for the Phillies and helped Philadelphia win the 2008 World Series title.

Eflin, 20, was 10-7 with a 3.80 ERA this year in 24 starts for Class A Lake Elsinore. Windle, 22, was a second-round draft pick in 2013 and went 12-8 with a 4.26 ERA in 25 starts and one relief appearance this year for Class A Rancho Cucamonga.

■ Pitcher Jake Peavy has agreed to a \$24 million, two-year contract to stay with the World Series champion San Francisco Giants, a person familiar with the negotiations said Friday.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity to The Associated Press because the deal had not yet been announced.

Peavy gets a \$4 million signing bonus, \$7 million next season and \$13 million in 2016. The deal includes a full no-trade provision and award bonuses.

A 33-year-old right-hander, Peavy helped Boston win the 2013 World Series, was traded to San Francisco on July 26 and won another championship with the Giants.

■ Former Atlanta right-hander Kris Medlen has agreed to an \$8.5 million, two-year contract with the Kansas City Royals after missing last season while he recovered from Tommy John surgery.

Medlen will make \$2 million next year and \$5.5 million in 2016 under the agreement announced Thursday and could earn up to \$10 million in performance bonuses based on starts and innings. The deal includes a 2017 option with a \$1 million buyout.

The 29-year-old went 14-12 with a 3.11 ERA in 2013, his only full season as a starter, and went 4-0 with a 1.00 ERA in his last five starts.

Medlen, who hurt his elbow in spring training, also missed most of the 2011 season while he was rehabbing from Tommy John surgery.

Briefly

49ers' Harbaugh refuses comment on Michigan offer

The Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — 49ers coach Jim Harbaugh is declining to respond to reports that he is weighing an offer from Michigan to become the new football coach at his alma mater.

Harbaugh has one season remaining on the \$25 million, five-year contract he signed in January 2011. Several media outlets, including ESPN and the NFL Network, have reported Harbaugh has a six-year offer on the table from the Wolverines to return to Ann Arbor.

"As you know, I'll only talk about the job that I have. We've been together a long time and it's a longstanding policy," Harbaugh said Thursday.

San Francisco general manager Trent Baalke said this week that a decision on Harbaugh's future would come after the season.

No-confidence for UAB head over scuttling

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — Faculty members at the University of Alabama at Birmingham have drafted a no-confidence resolution against the president following his decision to drop the school's football program despite it finishing with its best record in years.

The document, released Thursday by the university, accuses UAB President Ray Watts of failing to share governance of the university with faculty members. The decision to eliminate football came after first-year coach Bill Clark led the team to a record of 6-6, the best in years. Average attendance doubled this year to more than 20,000 fans per game, but Watts said the program wasn't sustainable.

The resolution sites complaints

over a series of moves including the decision to disband football and other athletic programs. A separate resolution requests "a comprehensive analysis of UAB Athletics that is transparent and includes consideration of campus-wide impact for discontinuation of any athletic program."

In other college football news:
■ Oregon coach Mark Helfrich confirmed Thursday that the third-ranked Ducks will be without star cornerback Ifo Ekpre-Olomu when they face Jameis Winston and Florida State in their playoff game next month.

■ Boston College has extended football coach Steve Addazio's contract by two years through 2020 after he led them to 14 wins in his first two seasons.

■ Memphis has reached agreement on a contract extension with football coach Justin Fuente, who

just led the Tigers to a share of their first conference title since 1971.

Carolina trades D Harrison to Jets

RALEIGH, N.C. — The Winnipeg Jets have acquired defenseman Jay Harrison from the Carolina Hurricanes in exchange for a draft pick.

Under terms of the deal announced Thursday, Carolina receives the Jets' sixth-round pick in the 2015 draft. That pick originally belonged to Ottawa.

The 32-year-old Harrison is reunited with Winnipeg coach Paul Maurice, whom he played for both in Toronto and Carolina.

Harrison had one goal and three assists in 20 games while skating at a minus-5 plus-minus rating this season.

Nyman wins Val Gardena downhill for 3rd time

VAL GARDENA, Italy — American racer Steven Nyman won the World Cup downhill on the classic Saslong course for the third time on Friday.

Nyman, 35, of Norway, who won the opening two downhills this season, finished second, 0.31 seconds behind.

Dominik Paris of Italy was third, 1.15 back.

Also:
■ Austrian skier Anna Fenninger posted the fastest time in a World Cup downhill training run ahead of countrywoman Regina Sterz and Lindsey Vonn on Friday.

Fenninger, who is second in overall standings behind Tina Maze, was 42 seconds faster than Sterz, and 45 quicker than Vonn.

NHL



GENE J. PUSKAS/AP

Penguins forward Blake Comeau, right, gets the puck behind Avalanche goalie Calvin Pickard to score in overtime during Thursday's game in Pittsburgh. The Penguins won the game 1-0.

Roundup

Pens hold off Avalanche in OT

The Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Blake Comeau scored 2:24 into overtime to give the Pittsburgh Penguins a 1-0 victory over the Colorado Avalanche on Thursday night.

Marc-Andre Fleury stopped 29 shots, registering his sixth shut-out of the season just hours after the Penguins thought their starting goalie had the mumps.

Fleury, who recorded his 34th NHL shutout, was tested after missing Wednesday's practice with an illness, but the results came back negative and he was cleared for Thursday's game.

Sidney Crosby also returned Thursday after missing three games with the mumps, as the Penguins managed three wins and five of a possible six points without their captain. They have won six of nine.

Calvin Pickard stopped 47 shots for the Avalanche, who lost for the sixth time in seven games.

Hurricanes 4, Maple Leafs 1: Justin Faulk had a goal and an assist, and Eastern Conference-worst Carolina broke a six-game losing streak with a win over previously surging Toronto.

The host Hurricanes had scored only one goal in each game of their skid. Their offensive outburst snapped the Maple Leafs' six-game winning streak.

Cam Ward had 25 saves for Carolina. Toronto's Jonathan Bernier stopped 33 shots.

Capitals 5, Blue Jackets 4 (OT): Eric Fehr scored 42 seconds into overtime to lead Washington over host Columbus.

The Capitals extended their point streak to seven games and snapped the Blue Jackets' winning streak at seven.

Joel Ward, Jason Chimera, Karl



MIKE MUNDEN/AP

Blue Jackets forward Mike Mendenhall celebrates his first NHL goal which gave Columbus a 4-3 lead over the Capitals. Washington came back to win 5-4 in overtime.

Alzner and Troy Brouwer also scored for the Capitals. Braden Holtby had 22 saves.

Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 31 shots for the Blue Jackets.

Panthers 2, Flyers 1 (SO): Dave Bolland scored the winning goal in the shootout to lead visit-

ing Florida over Philadelphia.

Branton Poirier also had a goal in the shootout for Florida (14-8-8), which played beyond regulation for the fourth straight game.

The Panthers were coming off Tuesday's 2-1 victory over Washington that set an NHL record by going 20 shootout rounds.

This one took six rounds as only Poirier and Philadelphia's Jakub Voracek scored in the three regulation rounds of the shootout.

Ducks 2, Canadiens 1: Matt Belesky scored the tiebreaking goal in the third period to lead Anaheim over Montreal in a game the host Canadiens lost top scorer Max Pacioretty to an injury.

Pacioretty left the game 4 minutes into the third period after taking a late hit into the boards from Anaheim's Clayton Stoner. Pacioretty spent several seconds on his knees before being helped to the dressing room.

Kings 6, Blues 4: Jake Muzzin scored the tiebreaking power-play goal with 11:02 to play, Marian Gaborik had two goals and two assists, and host Los Angeles rallied for a victory over St. Louis.

Anze Kopitar and Jeff Carter each had a goal and three assists as the defending Stanley Cup champions avenged a loss in St. Louis on Tuesday with just their second win in seven games.

Sharks 4, Oilers 3: Matt Tenney and Barclay Goodrow scored within 34 seconds of each other midway through the third period to lift San Jose over visiting Edmonton.

Logan Couture and James Sheppard also scored for the Sharks, who won their season-best fourth straight and eight of nine overall.

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Tampa Bay	33	20	10	3	43	110	87
Detroit	32	17	7	8	42	92	80
Montreal	33	10	12	11	42	88	82
Toronto	32	19	10	3	41	110	91
Florida	30	14	8	8	36	68	76
Boston	32	16	13	3	35	82	81
Ottawa	31	13	12	6	32	82	86
Buffalo	32	13	17	2	28	62	100

Metropolitan Division

Pittsburgh	31	21	6	4	46	99	71
N.Y. Islanders	31	15	11	5	35	89	89
Washington	31	15	10	6	36	91	85
N.J. Devils	29	15	10	4	34	89	79
Columbus	31	13	13	5	29	76	100
Philadelphia	31	11	14	6	28	81	92
New Jersey	33	11	16	6	28	74	86
Carolina	31	9	19	3	21	66	88

Western Conference

Central Division	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Chicago	32	22	9	1	45	100	64
St. Louis	32	21	9	2	44	98	78
Nashville	30	20	8	2	42	81	59
Winnipeg	32	16	10	6	38	75	78
Minnesota	30	16	12	2	34	86	78
Dallas	30	12	13	5	29	67	103
Colorado	31	10	13	8	28	78	99

Pacific Division

Anaheim	34	22	7	5	49	99	90
San Jose	33	18	11	4	40	84	85
Vancouver	31	18	11	2	39	88	78
Los Angeles	33	16	11	6	38	90	82
Calgary	33	17	12	2	37	80	80
Arizona	31	11	16	2	26	72	100
Edmonton	33	7	20	6	20	69	110

Notes: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss.

Wednesday's games

Ottawa 2, New Jersey 1
Boston 3, Minnesota 2
Dallas 2, Vancouver 1

Thursday's games

Florida 1, Philadelphia 1, 1-0
Pittsburgh 1, Colorado 0, 2-1
Carolina 4, Toronto 1
Washington 5, Columbus 4, OT
Anaheim 2, Montreal 1
Los Angeles 6, St. Louis 4
San Jose 4, Edmonton 3

Friday's games

Tampa Bay at New Jersey
Anaheim at Ottawa
N.Y. Islanders at Detroit
Dallas at Winnipeg
Dallas at Calgary

Saturday's games

Arizona at Los Angeles
Colorado at Buffalo
Philadelphia at Toronto
Ottawa at Montreal
Washington at New Jersey
Tampa Bay at N.Y. Islanders
Pittsburgh at Pittsburgh
N.Y. Rangers at Chicago
Chicago at Columbus
Nashville at Minnesota
Calgary at Vancouver
St. Louis at San Jose

Thursday

Penguins 1, Avalanche 0 (OT)

Colorado 0 0 0 0-0
Pittsburgh 1 0 0 0-0
Mike Mendenhall, 2:24

Overtime—1, Pittsburgh, Comeau 11 (Shank, Scuderi), 2:24

Shots on Goal—Colorado 7-15-7-0-29, Pittsburgh 8-16-15-4-48

Goals—Colorado, Pickard 4-5-2 (48 shots-47 saves), Pittsburgh, Fleury 18-4 (29-29)

A—16,603 (18,387). T—2:27.

Sharks 4, Oilers 3

Edmonton 1 2 0-3
San Jose 1 0 0-1

First Period—1, Edmonton, Gordon 5 (Perron, Petry), 14:43

Second Period—San Jose, Sheppard 4 (Goodrow, Karlsson), 5:51, 3, San Jose, 4 (Goodrow, Karlsson), 7:36, 4, Edmonton, 1 (Hendricks, Schultz), 8:22

Goals—Edmonton, Hopkin 5 (Eberle, Petry), 11:02

Third Period—6, San Jose, Tennyson 1 (Wings, Viach), 6:29 (pp.), 7, San Jose, Goodrow 2 (Burns, Karlsson), 8:03

Shots on Goal—Edmonton 8-13-7-28, San Jose 9-8-13-30

Power-play opportunities—Edmonton 0 of 1; San Jose 1 of 3

Goals—Edmonton, Scrivens 5-12-4 (30 shots-26 saves), San Jose, Niemi 13-7-28 (24 shots-21 saves), Montreal, Price 17-9-21 (22-21)

A—17,399 (17,562). T—2:18.

Ducks 2, Canadiens 1

Anaheim 1 0 1-2
Montreal 0 0 1-1

First Period—1, Anaheim, Lindholm 4 (Getzlaf), 8:16

Second Period—2, Montreal, Desharnais 4 (Hodson, Gauthier), 8:27, 3, Anaheim, Belesky 15 (Rakell, Smith-Pelly), 8:33

Shots on Goal—Anaheim 11-7-5-23, Montreal 9-12-3-24

Power-play opportunities—Anaheim 0 of 3; Montreal 1 of 3

Goals—Anaheim, Andersen 18-5-4 (24 shots-21 saves), Montreal, Price 17-9-21 (22-21)

A—21,286 (21,273). T—2:38.

Kings 6, Blues 4

St. Louis 1 0 0-4
Los Angeles 1 1 2-3-6

First Period—1, St. Louis, Backes 6 (Bouwmeester, Pietrangolo), 13:12 (pp.)

Second Period—2, St. Louis, Jaskin 2 (Lindbom, Berland), 14:23, 3, St. Louis, Stastny 4 (Steen, Stastny), 16:00 (pp.), 4, Los Angeles, Gaborik 8 (Carter, Kopitar), 17:45 (pp.)

Third Period—5, Los Angeles, Kopitar 7 (Gaborik, Carter), 6:14, 6, Los Angeles, Gaborik 9 (Doughty, Kopitar), 15:41 (pp.), 7, St. Louis, Letner 8 (Tarsenko), 16:11

Shots on Goal—St. Louis 11-8-9-28, Los Angeles 8-14-15-37

Power-play opportunities—St. Louis 2 of 3; Los Angeles 3 of 6

Goals—St. Louis, Mar, Brodeur 2-2-0 (37 shots-31 saves), Los Angeles, Quick 13-8-5 (28-24)

A—18,230 (18,118). T—2:37.

Panthers 2, Flyers 1 (SO)

Florida 1 0 0-2
Philadelphia 0 1 0-1

Florida won shootout 2-1

First Period—Florida, Ushakov 4 (Kopecky, Olsen), 9:37

Second Period—2, Philadelphia, Voracek 12 (Bellemare, Grossman), 4:07

Shootout—Florida 2 (Pirri 0, Blugstad 2), Philadelphia 1 (Gaborik 0, Voracek 0)

Shots on Goal—Florida 12-11-7-23, Philadelphia 9-5-4-26

Power-play opportunities—Florida 0 of 2; Philadelphia 0 of 1

Goals—Florida, Luongo 12-6-6 (26 shots-25 saves), Philadelphia, Mason 6-10-5 (32-31)

A—19,582 (19,541). T—2:50.

Hurricanes 4, Maple Leafs 1

Toronto 0 1 0-1
Carolina 2 0 1-5

First Period—1, Carolina, Terry 5 (E. Staal, Gerbe), 11:54, 2, Carolina, Faulk 6 (Owen, Sekera), 12:42 (pp.)

Second Period—3, Toronto, Paneuf 2 (Holland, Franson), 16:55

Third Period—4, Carolina, Sekera 1 (Faulk, Gerbe), 11:05 (pp.), 5, Carolina, Lindholm 8 (E. Staal, Hainsey), 18:36 (pp.)

Shots on Goal—Carolina 16-11-10-37, Toronto 16-11-10-37

Power-play opportunities—Toronto 0 of 3; Carolina 1 of 3

Goals—Toronto, Bernier 13-7-3 (36 shots-33 saves), Carolina, Ward 9-12-1 (26-25)

A—12,332 (18,680). T—2:31.

Capitals 5, Blue Jackets 4 (OT)

Washington 2 0 2-1-5
Columbus 2 0 2-4-0

First Period—1, Washington, Ward 11 (Fehr, Alzner), 9:51, 2, Washington, Chimera 3 (Latta, Orpik), 19:22

Second Period—3, Columbus, Johnson 3 (Foligno, Wisniewski), 8:48 (pp.), 4, Columbus, Foligno 15 (Connaughton, Johansen), 11:57 (pp.)

Third Period—5, Columbus, Foligno 16 (Morin, Gibbons), 5:2, 6, Washington, Alzner 2 (Latta, Chimera), 7:02, 7, Columbus, Chapp 1 (Boll, Calvert), 15:55, 8, Washington, Brodeur 17-17-00

Overtime—Washington, Fehr 7 (Green), 0-2-2

Shots on Goal—Washington 15-9-11-36, Columbus 5-16-6-26

Power-play opportunities—Washington 2 of 4; Columbus 2 of 4

Goals—Washington, Holtby 13-7-5 (38 shots-22 saves), Columbus, Bobrovsky 12-8-2 (36-31)

A—13,722 (18,144). T—2:37.

Scoring leaders

Through Dec. 18

	GP	G	A	Pts
Tyler Seguin, Dal	30	23	15	38
Evgeni Malkin, Pit	31	15	23	38
Paul Voracek, Phi	31	12	26	38
Vladimir Tarasenko, StL	32	20	17	37
Steven Stamkos, TB	31	18	17	35
Evan Getzlaf, ANH	33	10	25	35
Sidney Crosby, PIT	28	16	16	32
Claude Giroux, PHO	31	17	15	32
Phil Kessel, DET	32	17	14	31
David Knauth, NYR	29	17	13	33
Tyler Johnson, BOS	30	18	13	31
Patrick Kane, CHI	32	15	17	32
Nicklas Backstrom, Was	31	8	23	31
Mike Goffredo, BOS	30	8	23	31
Three tied with 30 pts.				

Calendar

Jan. 1 — Winter Classic: Chicago at Washington

Jan. 26-28 — All-Star break. **Jan. 29-30** — Stadium Series: Los Angeles vs. San Jose at Santa Clara, Calif.

April 11 — Regular season ends.

NBA

Rondo traded to Mavs

By JIMMY GOLEN
The Associated Press

BOSTON — The Boston Celtics traded point guard Rajon Rondo to Dallas on Thursday night, cutting ties with the last remnant of their last NBA championship while giving Dirk Nowitzki and the Mavericks a chance at another title.

The Celtics will send Rondo and forward Dwight Powell, a trade to Dallas for Jameer Nelson, Jay Crowder, Brandon Wright, two draft picks and a \$12.9 million trade exception.

"Welcome to Rajon Rondo the newest member of the Dallas Mavericks," team owner Mark Cuban wrote on the social media application Cyber Dust shortly before the official announcement. Cuban also thanked the three departing players, calling them "Amazing players and better people."

Boston got a first-round pick in next year's draft and a second-round pick in 2016. The Celtics have eight first-round picks in the next four years, picking them up in trades for Kevin Garnett and Paul Pierce and even coach Doc Rivers as they shed the pieces of the New Big Three that earned the franchise its unprecedented 17th NBA title in 2008.

Rondo would not have won Banner 17 without Rajon and will always consider him one of our most valuable Celtics," the team's owners said in a joint statement. "We will always cherish the time he was here."

The Mavericks get a pass-first point guard — a four-time all-star — to team with Nowitzki, Monta Ellis, Chandler Parsons and Tyson Chandler in what they hope will make them a contender again. Dallas is 19-8 this season but in third place in the Southwest Division and sixth in the Western Conference.

The Mavericks, who won their only NBA title in 2011, have not won a playoff series since.

The deal has been years in the making, with the Celtics shopping Rondo every time a coach grows tired of his moods or his contract expectations grow too large for their budget. But every previous time Boston management decided that the offers weren't enough.

Celtics general manager Danny Ainge found a partner in Dallas, which is coached by his former Boston teammate Rick Carlisle.

Rondo, 28, joined the rebuilding Celtics as the 21st overall pick out of Kentucky in 2006 and became the point guard for an NBA champion in his second year when Boston acquired Ray Allen and Kevin Garnett the next summer. They helped the Celtics reach the finals again two years later.

AP Basketball Writer Jon Krawczynski and AP Sports Writer Stephen Hawkins contributed to this report.



Milwaukee forward Jared Dudley, left, and Sacramento forward Carl Landry vie for the ball during Thursday's game in Sacramento, Calif.

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division			
	W	L	GB
Toronto	10	6	769
Brooklyn	10	4	9
Boston	14	3	9½
New York	5	23	176
Philadelphia	2	22	183
Southeast Division			
	W	L	GB
Washington	16	6	750
Atlanta	19	7	720 ½
Miami	12	14	62
Orlando	10	18	37
Charlotte	6	19	240 12½
Central Division			
	W	L	GB
Chicago	16	9	640
Cleveland	10	18	583 1½
L.A. Clippers	14	13	519
Indiana	8	18	308
Detroit	5	21	152

Western Conference

Southwest Division			
	W	L	GB
Memphis	21	4	840
L.A. Clippers	19	7	670
Dallas	19	8	704
Sacramento	13	12	524
New Orleans	13	12	524
Northwest Division			
	W	L	GB
Portland	12	14	62
Oklahoma City	12	14	62 ½
Denver	7	19	269
Utah	7	19	269
Minnesota	7	19	269
Pacific Division			
	W	L	GB
Golden State	22	3	880
LA Clippers	19	7	720
Phoenix	13	14	810
Sacramento	11	15	423 1½
L.A. Lakers	8	17	320

Wednesday's games			
Phoenix 111, Charlotte 106			
Dallas 127, Cleveland 98			
Utah 105, Miami 97			
Atlanta 117, Detroit 106			
Boston 108, Orlando 92			
Toronto 105, Brooklyn 89			
Memphis 117, San Antonio 116.30T			
Portland 104, Miami 97			
L.A. Clippers 102, Indiana 100			
Houston 115, Denver 111, OT			
Thursday's games			
Chicago 103, New York 97			
New Orleans 99, Houston 100			
Milwaukee 108, Sacramento 107			
Golden State 114, Oklahoma City 109			
Friday's games			
Oklahoma City at L.A. Lakers			
Charlotte at Philadelphia			
Orlando at Washington			
Atlanta at Miami			
Toronto at Detroit			
Minnesota at Boston			
Brooklyn at Cleveland			
Chicago at Memphis			
Portland at San Antonio			
L.A. Clippers at Denver			
Oklahoma City at L.A. Lakers			
Saturday's games			
Portland at New York			
Phoenix at New Orleans			
Utah at Charlotte			
Atlanta at Houston			
San Antonio at Dallas			
Indiana at Denver			
Milwaukee at L.A. Clippers			

Friday's games

Saturday's games			
	W	L	GB
Portland 104, Miami 97			
L.A. Clippers 102, Indiana 100			
Houston 115, Denver 111, OT			
Sunday's games			
	W	L	GB
Chicago 103, New York 97			
New Orleans 99, Houston 100			
Milwaukee 108, Sacramento 107			
Golden State 114, Oklahoma City 109			

Sunday's games

Monday's games			
	W	L	GB
Portland 104, Miami 97			
L.A. Clippers 102, Indiana 100			
Houston 115, Denver 111, OT			
Tuesday's games			
	W	L	GB
Chicago 103, New York 97			
New Orleans 99, Houston 100			
Milwaukee 108, Sacramento 107			
Golden State 114, Oklahoma City 109			

Tuesday's games

Wednesday's games			
	W	L	GB
Phoenix 111, Charlotte 106			
Dallas 127, Cleveland 98			
Utah 105, Miami 97			
Atlanta 117, Detroit 106			
Boston 108, Orlando 92			
Toronto 105, Brooklyn 89			
Memphis 117, San Antonio 116.30T			
Portland 104, Miami 97			
L.A. Clippers 102, Indiana 100			
Houston 115, Denver 111, OT			
Thursday's games			
	W	L	GB
Chicago 103, New York 97			
New Orleans 99, Houston 100			
Milwaukee 108, Sacramento 107			
Golden State 114, Oklahoma City 109			

Friday's games

Saturday's games			
	W	L	GB
Portland 104, Miami 97			
L.A. Clippers 102, Indiana 100			
Houston 115, Denver 111, OT			
Sunday's games			
	W	L	GB
Chicago 103, New York 97			
New Orleans 99, Houston 100			
Milwaukee 108, Sacramento 107			
Golden State 114, Oklahoma City 109			

Roundup

Warriors rally, down Mavericks

The Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Golden State Warriors coach Steve Kerr could only shake his head and grin while Kevin Durant put on the best performance of his young season in the first half.

Kerr and the Warriors were a lot happier they didn't have to deal with Durant in the second half.

Stephen Curry had 34 points and nine assists, and the Warriors rallied from an early 17-point deficit to beat Oklahoma City 114-109 on Thursday night after Durant left with a sprained right ankle.

"I thought we did a tremendous job on him in the second half. I didn't even notice him in the second half," Kerr joked. "We completely stopped him."

It was the only way the Warriors could avoid a second straight loss.

Durant scored a season-high 30 points on 10-for-13 shooting in a spectacular first half that ended with him stepping on Marreese Speights' foot. Durant said he had a mild ankle sprain and X-rays were negative.

The reigning NBA MVP said he hopes to play at the Los Angeles Lakers on Friday night but will see how he feels.

"I wanted to play. I wanted to go back out there but we wanted to be cautious," Durant said.

Oklahoma City had won seven straight games, which was the longest active streak in the NBA after Memphis snapped Golden State's 16-game winning streak Tuesday night.

Curry added seven rebounds, and Klay Thompson scored 19 points for the Warriors, who played without injured center Andrew Bogut (right knee) and forward David Lee (left hamstring) again.

Russell Westbrook led the Thunder with 33 points.

Westbrook and Curry traded go-ahead shots in the final minutes while the Warriors put together the deciding run.

Durant came back Dec. 2 after missing the team's first 17 games with a broken right foot, and his latest injury ended his best performance yet this season.

The game lost most of its buzz when Durant didn't return, and neither team created much separation in the second half, setting up the tight finish.

Pelicans 99, Rockets 90: Anthony Davis had 30 points, 14 rebounds and five blocks to lead visiting New Orleans over Houston.

The Pelicans trailed by one early in the fourth quarter before using a 7-0 run to take a 79-73 lead and they didn't trail again. Ryan Anderson scored the last

five points in that spurt to help New Orleans snap a six-game skid in Houston.

True Holiday added 16 points with 10 assists for New Orleans and Anderson had 16 points.

James Harden scored 21 and Dwight Howard had 17 points with 13 rebounds for the Rockets, who lost for just the second time in nine games.

Harden entered leading the NBA in scoring and had scored more than 40 points in two of his last three games. But he had a tough night by his standards and made just eight of 23 shots.

Bulls 103, Knicks 97: Jimmy Butler scored a career-high 35 points and host Chicago beat New York in a game missing All-Stars Derrick Rose and Carmelo Anthony.

Playing without Rose, who sat out with an illness, the Bulls got another strong game from Butler. He was 11-for-21 from the floor and four three-pointers, five rebounds, seven assists and four steals.

Still, the Bulls had trouble shaking a short-handed New York team that's lost three straight and 13 of 14.

Pau Gasol scored 20 points for Chicago, which went on a 12-0 run in the fourth quarter to take an 87-77 lead.

The Knicks were led by Tim Hardaway Jr., who had 23 points and five three-pointers.

Anthony was sidelined with a sore left knee. New York also was without Andrea Bargnani (right hamstring), Cleanthony Early (right knee), Iman Shumpert (left shoulder) and J.R. Smith (left foot).

Bucks 108, Kings 107: Brandon Knight scored 20 points and visiting Milwaukee spoiled DeMarcus Cousins' return to struggling Sacramento.

With their inside game lacking due to missing players, the Bucks shot well from the perimeter for much of the night in winning their third in four games. They went 10-for-14 from three-point range in the first half and made 13 overall from beyond the arc. O.J. Mayo and Jared Dudley added 19 points apiece for Milwaukee, outscored 48-26 in the paint.

Playing for the first time in more than three weeks, Cousins looked fatigued at times but still had 22 points, 11 rebounds and six assists in nearly 33 minutes for the Kings.

He missed a 15-foot jumper at the buzzer that would have won it.

Cousins sat out 10 straight games with viral meningitis, and the Kings went 2-8 in his absence. He last played Nov. 26 at Houston.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Jones leads No. 2 Duke to win over UConn

Freshman PG scores 21 as Blue Devils improve to 10-0

By TOM CANAVAN
The Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — Two possessions into the second half, Mike Krzyzewski had seen more than enough from his young and talented Duke team and let them know it in forceful terms that any young man would understand.

After hollering at his second-ranked Blue Devils to get over to the bench, Coach K asked them what was wrong and then told them to wake up, throwing in an occasional salty word.

While the tirade didn't sink in immediately, Duke (10-0) got the message.

Freshman point guard Tyus Jones scored 21 points, Justise Winslow hit two key baskets late in the game and Duke beat defending national champion Connecticut 66-56 on Thursday night.

"We were out to lunch. I mean, we were in La-La land," Krzyzewski said. "I had to take the timeout to get us back into it."

Connecticut (4-4) managed to tie the game at 30 after the timeout, but Duke responded with a 15-2 run and never lost the lead.

"It just shows the passion he has for the game," Jones said. "It shows how much the game means to him. He still has that passion. We weren't playing well and he let us know it. He still has that, depending on the situation. That's when he gets on us. We deserved that."

Winslow and Jahliel Okafor — the other two members of the Blue Devils' trio of talented freshmen — added 12 points apiece. Amile Jefferson added 11 points and 13 rebounds in a game that had the feel and intensity of a NCAA tournament contest.

"UConn played a tough, physical game. It was a good experience for us," said senior Quinn Cook, who added 10 points. "We just had more good plays than they did."

Ryan Boatright had 22 points to lead the



JULIO CORTES/AP

Connecticut guard Ryan Boatright (11) makes a steal against Duke guard Tyus Jones during Thursday's game in East Rutherford, N.J. Jones scored 21 points to lead the No. 2 Blue Devils past the defending national champion Huskies.

Huskies. Kentan Facey added 14 points and Daniel Hamilton had 10.

Duke has won all 10 of its games by at least 10 points, but this one was a lot closer being played in the Izod Center in the Meadowlands sports complex before a near sellout, pro-Huskies crowd.

Trailing 30-25 at the half, Connecticut scored the first five points and it had a chance to take the lead but Boatright missed the second of two free throws.

It was all Duke after that. The Blue Devils

went on a 15-2 spurt with Winslow putting in a rebound and Jones hitting a layup for the first four points.

Connecticut made a couple of runs. It drew within 53-45 on one of Boatright's three second-half three-pointers, but Okafor hit two free throws.

Consecutive rebound follows by Facey got UConn within 57-51 with 3:48 to play, but Winslow hit a three-pointer off a Jones feed and Jones added two free throws to push the lead to 62-51.

Connecticut's last chance came when Boatright hit another three-pointer to close to gap to 62-56 with 2:00 to go, but Winslow followed the second of two missed free throws by Okafor with a rebound layup and Duke was never threatened.

"There are games within games and there are situations where we are not able to make plays," Connecticut coach Kevin Ollie said. "You can't keep blaming it on youth. We have to grow up and make those game-winning plays."



STEVE HELMER/AP

Virginia forward Anthony Gill, center, is pressured by Cleveland State guard Charlie Lee, right, and forward Marlin Mason, background, during the second half of Thursday's game in Charlottesville, Va. Virginia won 70-54.

No. 6 Cavaliers handle Vikings

By HANK KURZ JR.
The Associated Press

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. — Justin Anderson's eyes lit up at the thought that No. 6 Virginia held Cleveland State scoreless for more than 10 minutes.

"That was super sick," Anderson said of the first-half stretch in the Cavaliers' 70-54 victory on Thursday night. "If we can ask ourselves to do that throughout the whole game, I think this team can go to another level defensively."

Anderson scored 14 of his 16 points in the second half, helping Virginia shake off the rust of an 11-day layoff for exams. The Cavaliers (10-0) won their 16th straight at home and matched their best start since the 2000-01 season.

Malcolm Brogdon also scored 16 and Anthony Gill had 13. Brogdon was equally pleased with the defensive work.

Virginia came into the game holding opponents to a nation's best 47.4 points and 32.1 percent shooting, third best, and used

Did you know

With Thursday's 70-54 win over Cleveland State, Virginia improved to 10-0, the program's best start since 2000-01.

SOURCE: The Associated Press

that ability to make scoring tough for its opponents to stay in front even when it was struggling to make shots.

"Being rusty and missing shots, I thought we came out and we were locked in on the defensive end," Brogdon said.

The Vikings made just 7 of 26 shots before halftime, or 26.9 percent.

Trey Lewis scored 18 to lead the Vikings (5-6). Cleveland State scored just four points in the first 13½ minutes, and was blanked for 10:05.

"At moments, I thought we played hard, but we weren't accomplishing anything," Cleveland State coach Gary Waters said. "You know who I'm going to give that to? That's Virginia. Their defense is pretty strong."

The Cavaliers looked sluggish throughout the first half, keeping the Vikings within striking distance. Even when Cleveland State went 10:05 between points, missing 15 of 16 shots in one stretch, Virginia's lead was just 16-4.

Vinny Zollo ended the drought with a three-pointer 6:28 before halftime, one of four the Vikings hit before the break.

"If we had hit any shots, that would have been a seven- or eight-point game" at halftime, Waters said.

Virginia, meanwhile, made only two outside shots the entire half.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

The Reason for the Season

Three weeks. 39 bowl games. We've got excuses to watch them all:

Saturday, Dec. 20:

R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl

Nevada (minus 1) vs.
Louisiana-Lafayette

Why watch? Someone thought it would be fun to start a football game at 10 a.m. in New Orleans. Wait for the crowd shots and try to spot the fans who went straight from Bourbon Street to the Superdome.

Pick: LOUISIANA-LAFAYETTE 28-24.

Gildan New Mexico Bowl in Albuquerque

UTEP (plus 10½) vs. Utah State
Why watch? Brothers Zach and Nick Vigil play linebacker for Utah State and have combined for 181 tackles. Every time a Vigil makes a tackle, take a sip of your favorite beverage. We would suggest Dr Pepper if you plan to watch the second half.

Pick: UTAH STATE 31-14.

Royal Purple Las Vegas Bowl

Colorado State (plus 3) vs. Utah
Why watch? Your last memory of Utes star receiver/returner Kaelin Clay should not be of him absent-mindedly dropping the football a yard short of the end zone against Oregon. One of the most exciting special teams players in the country plays his last college game.

Pick: UTAH 30-21.

Famous Idaho Potato Bowl in Boise

Western Michigan (plus 1½) vs. Air Force
Why watch? The winning team will be the owner of the biggest turnaround season in the country. Both the Broncos (8-4) and Falcons (9-3) have already won seven more games than they did last year.

Pick: WESTERN MICHIGAN 27-23.

Raycom Camelia Bowl in Montgomery, Ala.

Bowling Green (plus 3) vs. South Alabama
Why watch? Do you like hockey? South Alabama QB Brandon Bridge was born in Toronto. His nickname is "Air Canada." Close enough.

Pick: BOWLING GREEN 42-24.

Monday, Dec. 22

Miami Beach Bowl

BYU (plus 1) vs. Memphis
Why watch? By next season Memphis' Justin Fuente will be the coach you want your school to hire.

Pick: MEMPHIS 30-28.

Tuesday, Dec. 23:

Boca Raton Bowl

Marshall (minus 10) vs. Northern Illinois
Why watch? Outside of the College Football Playoff semifinals, this is the only bowl game matching conference champions.

Pick: MARSHALL 45-38.

San Diego County Credit Union Poinsettia Bowl

Navy (plus 3) vs. San Diego State
Why watch? Every time Navy QB Keenan Reynolds scores a touchdown you get to reminisce about a college football star from the past. Remember how great Ron Dayne was? Reynolds' next TD will be No. 63, matching the Wisconsin Heisman Trophy winner. Two more touchdowns pulls Reynolds even with Indiana great Anthony Thompson and Texas star Cedric Benson.

Pick: NAVY 28-24.

Wednesday, Dec. 24:

Popeyes Bahamas Bowl in Nassau

Western Kentucky (minus 3½) vs. Central Michigan
Why watch? It's a football game on a tropical island, with the possibility of limitless access to fried chicken. This is paradise.

Pick: Three-piece spicy with a biscuit and Cajun rice. And WESTERN KENTUCKY 38-28.

Hawaii Bowl in Honolulu

Rice (minus 2) vs. Fresno State
Why watch? What else are you going to do while putting together that doll house or bicycle on the night before Christmas?

Pick: RICE 27-21.

Friday, Dec. 26:

Zaxby's Heart of Dallas Bowl

Illinois (plus 6) vs. Louisiana Tech
Why watch? It's the day after Christmas. Haven't you spent enough time with your family yet?

Pick: ILLINOIS 35-24.

Quick Lane Bowl in Detroit

Rutgers (plus 3) vs. North Carolina
Why watch? Great player you probably don't know: Rutgers WR Leonte Carmo, who averages more yards per catch (19.68) than any 1,000-yard receiver in the country.

Pick: RUTGERS 42-38.

Bitcoin St. Petersburg Bowl

UCF (minus 2) vs. N.C. State
Why watch? Maybe UCF coach George O'Leary can explain what Bitcoin is.

Pick: UCF 28-23.

Saturday, Dec. 27:

Military Bowl Presented by Northrop Grumman in Annapolis, Md.

Virginia Tech (plus 3) vs. Cincinnati
Why watch? Virginia Tech's offense is terrible. Cincinnati's defense is awful. Let's see what happens.

Pick: VIRGINIA TECH 33-24.

Hyundai Sun Bowl in El Paso, Texas

Duke (plus 7½) vs. Arizona State
Why watch? Lots of great freshmen running backs around the country this season. Two that didn't get a lot of attention face off: Duke's Shaun Wilson (8.0 yards per carry) and Arizona State's Demario Richardson (5.6 per carry).

Pick: ARIZONA STATE 38-21.

Duck Commander Independence Bowl in Shreveport, La.

Miami (minus 3½) vs. South Carolina
Why watch? What if I told you the next ESPN 30-for-30 on The U could start in a Bossier City, La., casino?

Pick: SOUTH CAROLINA 24-17.

New Era Pinstripe Bowl in New York

Boston College (minus 2½) vs. Penn State
Why watch? Get a look at the most under-appreciated coaching job this season. BC's Steve Addazio won seven games in a so-called rebuilding year.

Pick: BOSTON COLLEGE 21-14.

National University Holiday Bowl in San Diego

Nebraska (plus 6½) vs. Southern California
Why watch? Your friends who only casually follow college football will think this is a huge game.

Pick: USC 31-21.

Monday, Dec. 29:

Autozone Liberty Bowl in Memphis, Tenn.

West Virginia (minus 3½) vs. Texas A&M
Why watch? Two promising young passers: Texas A&M will start freshman Jake Allen. West Virginia's Skyler Howard might only get starter duty, depending on the health of spot Clint Trickett.

Pick: TEXAS A&M 42-35.

Russell Athletic Bowl in Orlando, Fla.

Clemson (plus 3) vs. Oklahoma
Why watch? Former Sooners defensive coordinator Brent Venables now leads the Clemson D. It's the "Vena-bowl!"

Pick: CLEMSON 20-17.

Texas Bowl in Houston

Texas (plus 6) vs. Arkansas
Why watch? Do you long for the days when football teams only passed when absolutely necessary? Then this game is for you. Only two SEC teams have thrown fewer passes than Arkansas. Only one Big 12 team averages fewer yards passing per game than Texas.

Pick: ARKANSAS 21-13.

Tuesday, Dec. 30:

Franklin American Mortgage Music City Bowl in Nashville, Tenn.

Notre Dame (plus 7½) vs. LSU
Why watch? Notre Dame QB Everett Golson (22 turnovers) embraces the spirit of giving that makes the holiday season special.

Pick: LSU 34-21.

Belk Bowl in Charlotte, N.C.

Louisville (plus 7) vs. Georgia
Why watch? We were deprived of a full season of Louisville WR Devante Parker, who played in only five games because of a broken foot and still caught 35 passes for 726 yards. Get one last look him in a Cardinals uniform.

Pick: LOUISVILLE 28-24.

Foster Farms Bowl in Santa Clara, Calif.

Stanford (minus 14) vs. Maryland
Why watch? The season is almost over and you probably need another reminder that Maryland is in the Big Ten.

Pick: STANFORD 31-14.

Wednesday, Dec. 31:

Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl in Atlanta

Mississippi (plus 3½) vs. TCU
Why watch? Land sharks (Ole Miss defense) vs. Air Frogs (TCU offense).

Pick: TCU 34-27.

Vizio Fiesta Bowl in Glendale, Ariz.

Boise State (plus 3½) vs. Arizona
Why watch? Boise State returns to the site of its greatest triumphs, trying to score another victory for the little guys.

Pick: ARIZONA 45-28.

Capital One Orange Bowl in Miami

Mississippi State (minus 7) vs. Georgia Tech
Why watch? The theory is that given several weeks to prepare, bowl opponents figure out Georgia Tech's triple-option offense. Hence, the Yellow Jackets' 15-0 bowl record under coach Paul Johnson. Watch the Bulldogs test that theory, and then watch Johnson get testy with the first person who asks him about it in the postgame.

Picks: MISSISSIPPI STATE 38-28.

Thursday, Jan. 1:

Outback Bowl in Tampa, Fla.

Wisconsin (plus 6½) vs. Auburn
Why watch? Wisconsin star Melvin Gordon needs 233 yards rushing to break Barry Sanders' FBS single-season record. Totally doable.

Picks: AUBURN 38-30.

Goodyear Cotton Bowl Classic at Arlington, Texas

Michigan State (plus 3) vs. Baylor
Why watch? Baylor wanted to be in the playoff. Last chance to show the selection committee it was wrong.

Pick: MICHIGAN STATE 38-31.

Buffalo Wild Wings Citrus Bowl in Orlando, Fla.

Minnesota (plus 5) vs. Missouri
Why watch? Flip over from the Cotton Bowl every once in a while. Maybe you'll find out why Minnesota tight end Max Williams, a second-team All-American, has that extra "x."

Pick: Minnesota 23-20.

Rose Bowl presented by Northwestern Mutual in Pasadena, Calif.

Playoff semifinal: Oregon (minus 9) vs. Florida State
Why watch? Sure a spot in the championship game is on the line, but this matchup between Marcus Mariota and James Winston also kicks off ESPN's non-stop, four-month NFL Draft coverage.

Pick: FLORIDA STATE 34-29.

Allstate Sugar Bowl in New Orleans

Playoff semifinal: Alabama (minus 9½) vs. Ohio State
Why watch? Two heavyweight programs with superstar coaches that most fans love to hate, and somebody has to win. Look on the bright side haters: somebody also has to lose.

Pick: ALABAMA 28-17.

Friday, Jan. 2:

Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl in Fort Worth, Texas

Pittsburgh (minus 3) vs. Houston
Why watch? Because interim coaches — both teams have one — are people, too.

Pick: PITTSBURGH 23-17.

TaxSlayer Bowl in Jacksonville, Fla.

Iowa (plus 3) vs. Tennessee
Why watch? To see Iowa All-America tackle Brandon Scherff. Trust us. There won't be much else to watch offensively from the Hawkeyes (79th in the country in yards per play) and Volunteers (115th in ypp).

Pick: TENNESSEE 17-14.

Valero Alamo Bowl in San Antonio

UCLA (plus 1) vs. Kansas State
Why watch? You now know which UCLA team will show up. The one that crushed Arizona State and USC? Or the one that was crushed by Oregon and Stanford?

Pick: UCLA 31-23.

Ticketcity Cactus Bowl in Tempe, Ariz.

Oklahoma State (plus 5½) vs. Washington
Why watch? Shaq Thompson at linebacker for the Washington. Shaq Thompson at running back. Wonder what kind of arm he has?

Pick: WASHINGTON 24-14.

Saturday, Jan. 3:

Birmingham (Ala.) Bowl

Florida (minus 7) vs. East Carolina
Why watch? Find out why Florida just agreed to pay \$5 million to hire Colorado State's coach.

Pick: FLORIDA 31-21.

GoDaddy Bowl in Mobile, Ala.

Toledo (minus 3) vs. Arkansas State
Why watch? It's the fourth straight appearance for Arkansas State and the first time you'll actually get to see their coach in Mobile. The past three years the Red Wolves have had interim coaches by the time they played in the postseason.

Pick: Toledo 28-20.

College Football Playoff Championship in Arlington, Texas

Florida State (projected line: minus 7) vs. Alabama
Why watch? Can the Tide bring the national title back to the Southeastern Conference or will Florida State repeat as champion?

Pick: Alabama 31-23.

NFL

Eagles can't afford mistakes against Redskins

By JOSEPH WHITE
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The NFC East title could very well hinge on whether the Philadelphia Eagles or Dallas Cowboys slip up against the lowly Washington Redskins.

The Eagles (9-5) go first with a Saturday visit to Washington. Then the first-place Cowboys (10-4) head to the nation's capital a week later for their season finale.

Philadelphia holds the tiebreaker over Dallas, but that's moot if the Cowboys win out. The Eagles have lost two in a row and could very well end up with 11 wins and no trip to the playoffs, even though their record would be at least three games better than the winner of NFC South.

"If we win 11 games and it's not good enough to get in, shame on us because we didn't win the right games," Philadelphia coach Chip Kelly said. "That's the bottom line. That's what this whole deal is all about, and we know it going in."

Few are expecting much resistance from the Redskins (3-11), who have lost six straight and just made their fifth starting quarterback change this season. They've lost their past three games by 22, 24 and 11 points.

But strange things sometimes happen: Washington's signature win this year came on a Monday night in October at Dallas, and the Redskins' top offensive output came when they gained 427 yards in a 37-34 loss at Philadelphia in September.

"We've got to play in a crucial situation, and somebody's got to rise above it and make a play. Unfortunately, we were unable to do



**Philadelphia Eagles (9-5)
at Washington Redskins (3-11)**

AFN-Sports
10 p.m. Saturday CET
6 a.m. Sunday JKT

that against Philadelphia," first-year Redskins coach Jay Gruden said. "It was obviously a very good game, but we came out on the short end of the stick, which isn't good enough."

Here's more to notice as the teams convene on the last Saturday before Christmas, when disgruntled, gone-shopping Redskins fans will leave more room in the stadium than usual for the vocal contingent from Philly:

QB trials: Mark Sanchez knows what it's like to be hurt, and what it's like to have people questioning his competence. Maybe Robert Griffin III could use him as a role model.

Sanchez has had a revival of sorts in Philadelphia after four challenging years with the New York Jets. He's kept the Eagles afloat as the starting quarterback while Nick Foles recovers from a broken collarbone.

"Win, lose or draw, I am in a great opportunity and I can't ever forget that, how fun this is," Sanchez said. "And usually when I am feeling like that, I am playing pretty well."

QB trials, Part 2: That said,



MATT ROURE/AP

The Cowboys' Dez Bryant is tackled by the Eagles' Bradley Fletcher, left, and Mychal Kendricks during a game Dec. 14. Philadelphia needs to win its next two games, and it needs a loss by Dallas to earn the NFC East title.

Sanchez needs to do more than just keep the Eagles afloat if they're to repeat as NFC East champs. He's 3-3 as a starter with 10 touchdowns and nine interceptions. In fact, Philadelphia's team passer rating (82.6) is substan-

tially lower than the Redskins' (89.9).

Griffin regains the job in Washington after Colt McCoy was placed on injured reserve this week with a sprained neck. Gruden hasn't set the bar par-

ticularly high, citing Griffin's ongoing struggles to get a grasp on the fundamentals of drop-back passing.

"I don't expect perfection from him," Gruden said. "But we want to see improvement."

Chargers face must-win game at San Francisco

By JANIE MCCAULEY
The Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Philip Rivers and the San Diego Chargers are competing for their playoff lives with two games to go, slim as those chances might be.

Surprisingly, the San Francisco 49ers find themselves playing only to finish on a strong note — not for another deep postseason run they had become so used to in the first three years under embattled coach Jim Harbaugh.

It will be a little strange, indeed, for San Francisco with nothing at stake Saturday night on its home field.

Not that Rivers expects Harbaugh's team to back down one bit at this stage despite the uncomfortable circumstances and constant, swirling questions about Harbaugh's future with one season remaining on his \$25 million, five-year contract.

"This is a team we respect a lot. They've been to three championship games and there's lots of reasons why maybe this year didn't turn out," Rivers said. "It's a little game in December with one week to go. Two teams are in different



DENIS PORO/AP

Quarterback Philip Rivers and the Chargers need to win, and get help from other teams, to keep their playoff chances alive.

circumstances, but both have a lot of prideful guys and guys who are going to give everything. It will be a playoff-type intensity type of game."

The Chargers (8-6) are in a

closing stretch that included a win at Baltimore and home losses to New England and Denver. They've gone from controlling their own destiny in the wildcard race to needing to win at San



**San Diego Chargers (8-6)
at San Francisco 49ers (7-7)**

AFN-Sports
2 a.m. Sunday CET
10 a.m. Sunday JKT

Francisco and at Kansas City, and get some help.

San Francisco (7-7) has its first three-game losing streak during Harbaugh's tenure, with two of those coming at the hands of the defending Super Bowl champion Seattle Seahawks in an 18-day span.

Now, the Niners are playing for a winning season.

"There's a lot at stake. That's the way we approach it," Harbaugh said.

Here are some other things to watch for Saturday at Levi's Stadium:

Banged-up Chargers: Rivers

sat out practice Wednesday, apparently to rest chest and back injuries. He said he anticipates starting Saturday night.

He will be down one of his favorite options, Keenan Allen, who was placed on injured reserve Tuesday with a broken right collarbone. In addition, inside linebacker Donald Butler went on IR on Monday with a dislocated left elbow.

Defensive tackle Corey Liuget said the Chargers need to learn from the losses and move on fast.

"We always know we can play with the best of them, but in order to be the best, to be considered one of the top three to five teams in the NFL, you've got to beat the best and we didn't prove that the last two weeks," he said.

Will Gore go? Midweek, 49ers running back Frank Gore declared himself symptom-free from a concussion suffered last Sunday at Seattle and Harbaugh expects him to play. In what could be his final two weeks with the 49ers, Gore needs 196 yards rushing for his fourth consecutive 1,000-yard season and eighth in his 10 NFL seasons.

SPORTS



Mavericks make move

Dallas acquires Rondo
from Boston | **NBA, Page 27**

NFL

Williams' presence felt in Buffalo

By **JOHN WAWROW**
The Associated Press

Jerry Hughes shakes his head in dismay and mutters, "That's crazy." The Bills defensive end has difficulty imagining how the Houston Texans were being second-guessed for selecting Mario Williams with the No. 1 pick in the 2006 draft.

No offense to running back Reggie Bush or quarterback Vince Young, who went Nos. 2 and 3, but Hughes makes his case by noting the numbers Williams has consistently put up through six seasons

in Houston and the past three in Buffalo. "Numbers speak volume," Hughes said. "It's tough to (compare) offense and defense. I get that. But just look at the guy. I don't think he's staggered off of anything."

Williams hasn't. The 29-year-old defensive end is enjoying what might be his most impressive season by placing a pass-rushing stamp on a defense that ranks among the NFL's best.

Williams has a team-leading 13 sacks — one off his career high — on a defense that leads the league with 49. And he's producing game-changing plays for the Bills (8-6), who have already won their most games since a 9-7 finish in 2004. They play at Oakland (2-12) on Sunday.

Williams particularly made his presence felt in a 21-13 win over Green Bay last weekend. After blocking a field goal in the second quarter, Williams sealed the victory by forcing quarterback Aaron Rodgers to fumble into the end zone for a safety on what became the Packers' final possession.

"Obviously, great play," said defensive tackle Kyle Williams. "I think that kind of signifies him. We got in a position where we needed a play, and he was able to make it for us."

In the process, the player nicknamed "Super Mario" is performing to the \$100 million contract he signed in Buffalo in March 2012, and continues to affirm his draft status as a former No. 1 pick.

Williams isn't one for introspection or retrospection. He'll call his last game his best only because, as he put it: "You're only as good as your last game. We won."

The three-time Pro Bowl selection is not one for rating his seasons. And forget asking whether he's ever been motivated to

SEE SUPER ON PAGE 31

Inside:

■ Jaguars win battle between two of league's worst teams, Page 31



Why watch? Reasons to tune in for all 39 bowls
College football, Page 29

No. 2 Duke goes on run, puts away UConn
College basketball, Page 28